

Maryland Department of Health encourages parents to bring children's vaccinations up-to-date amid COVID-19 pandemic

Baltimore, MD – The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) launched a new public service announcement this week encouraging parents to review their children's scheduled vaccination status and bring them up-to-date on missed vaccinations.

MDH is raising awareness based on recent data showing a significant decrease in pediatric vaccination rates both in Maryland and across the United States after a national emergency was declared on March 13.

"Parents have kept children home to keep them safe, which was the right thing to do. But now we need to bring children up-to-date with their vaccinations to protect them," said MDH Secretary Robert R. Neall. "There is no vaccine yet to prevent COVID-19, but there are vaccines to prevent other serious illnesses, like measles and pertussis. If children fall behind on necessary vaccinations, it leaves them vulnerable to these illnesses."

Recent data from ImmuNet, Maryland's immunization information system, shows that the overall number of vaccine doses administered to children ages 0-18 in March 2020 compared with March 2019 was down 27 percent; comparing April 2020 to April 2019, the number of doses was down by 56 percent.

The data also show significant declines in vaccine doses administered by vaccine type for both timeframes. For the routine childhood vaccines given to children younger than 24 months, the largest decreases were seen in the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine, with a decrease of 71 percent, and varicella (chickenpox) vaccine with a decrease of 68 percent.

According to a recent Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), disruptions were anticipated in the U.S. health care system's ability to continue to provide routine preventive and other non-emergency care, including vaccinations. On March 24, CDC posted guidance emphasizing the importance of routine well-child care visits and vaccinations, particularly for children ages 24 months and younger, when many childhood vaccines are recommended.

"Pediatric practices have implemented many strategies to make acute and routine care of children as safe as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Dr. Maria Brown, President of the Maryland chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "Pediatricians and pediatric healthcare providers want to ensure that children are up-to-date on essential immunizations to avoid outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles and whooping cough."

In Maryland, parents can view their children's official vaccination records online via [MD.MyIR.net](https://mdmyir.net), a free and secure online portal where users can access official copies of their

records and those of their family members. These records are accepted by schools, camps, daycare facilities, state agencies and other organizations that require proof of immunization.

Using a simple, one-time registration process, users can create an account via [MD.MyIR.net](https://md.myir.net), with the option to add family members. The portal is linked to ImmuNet, where health care providers upload and store vaccination records. The system is HIPPA-compliant and records are only available to authorized users.

"Parents are encouraged to check MyIR to confirm the status of their children's vaccination schedule," said MDH Deputy Secretary for Public Health Fran Phillips. "They should then work with their children's health care providers to schedule appointments, attend well-child visits and make sure they get back on track with any overdue vaccinations as soon as possible."

In addition to health care providers, some local health departments plan to resume immunization clinics this summer. Consult the local health departments for additional information. For more information about MyIR and ImmuNet, visit [MD.MyIR.net](https://md.myir.net).

To view Maryland's new pediatric immunization PSA, visit: <https://youtu.be/OYBqx6QAqzA>