Survey: Most VFC providers open, offering vaccinations
by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

As schools consider re-entry, a new survey found many pediatric practices are open and offering vaccinations children may have delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Resumption of vaccination activities is critical to protecting children and adolescents from vaccine-preventable diseases as well as to preventing outbreaks," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) researchers wrote in a new Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

The CDC surveyed nearly 2,000 practices that participate in the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program and found 90% were open as of mid-May. Of those, 81% were offering immunization services to all patients, and 15% were offering immunizations to some patients.

Among those not offering immunization services to all children, many were prioritizing the youngest patients in accordance with CDC guidance, and some of the practices said they expected to expand their services this summer. In addition, about 59% of all practices said they likely would have the capacity to accept new patients for vaccination through August.

Practices in the Northeast were more likely to be closed or have limited hours compared to other regions, and urban areas were more likely to have reduced hours compared to rural areas, the survey found.

An earlier CDC study found childhood vaccinations across the country plummeted in mid-March after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. However, VFC vaccine orders in late May and early June were similar to the same time period last year, "suggesting that the current immunization infrastructure can meet the expected need to provide vaccines that are overdue to many children," according to the new report.

The AAP says receiving recommended vaccinations is "vital" to school re-entry this fall. CDC researchers encouraged public health officials and clinicians to help educate parents experiencing hardships during the pandemic about their children's potential eligibility for free vaccines through the VFC program. Clinicians also should reach out to patients about scheduling well-child visits and catching up on vaccines.

The AAP has released guidance on conducting well-child visits during the COVID-19 pandemic at https://bit.ly/AAPWellChild and has launched a #CallYourPediatrician campaign to encourage these visits.

The AAP also recommends all eligible members apply for federal Provider Relief Fund dollars and has published an FAQ at https://bit.ly/2BXxImx.

**Resources**

- CDC immunization schedules
- AAP clinical report "Countering Vaccine Hesitancy"
- Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on seeing a pediatrician during the COVID-19 pandemic
- AAP immunization resources