

How Early Care and Education Can Help Children Keep Their Vaccinations Up-to-Date:

A TOOLKIT FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROVIDERS

April 2024



Background

The health and well-being of all children, families, and early care and education (ECE) providers is a top priority. Staying up-to-date with routine vaccinations will help protect and keep young children, families, and ECE communities healthy and prevent unforeseen program closures by protecting against vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks. Immunization is especially important for children under 5 years of age because their immune systems have not built up the necessary defenses to fight infection, making them more susceptible to diseases. Drops in routine vaccine coverage among children place them and ECE staff at increased risk of serious illness.ⁱ

During the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions in routine health services resulted in declines in well-child visits, and in turn, routine vaccination in the United States.ⁱⁱ [Combined 7-vaccine series](#) coverage dropped by 5 percent and has not yet rebounded among young children living in rural areas and below poverty.ⁱⁱⁱ Vaccination rates among children entering kindergarten also dropped by 2 percent from 2020-2022 (and by as much as 10 percent in some states) to the lowest levels in decades. This translates to as many as 750,000 children who entered kindergarten during the pandemic and are potentially susceptible to vaccine-preventable diseases.^{iv}



Recent [measles cases and outbreaks](#) in the [U.S.](#) and [Europe](#) underscore the large impact that small declines in vaccination coverage can have and that undervaccinated and unvaccinated children are at risk for serious illness.^v For many ECE programs, staying up-to-date with vaccines is necessary before a child can be enrolled. ECE programs can also play a critical role in kindergarten readiness by supporting families to increase the number of children that are up-to-date on their vaccinations before the first day of kindergarten helping ensure they are healthy and ready to learn.

Call to Action

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls on [ECE](#) providers and other childcare professionals to support kindergarten vaccination readiness. ECE providers are trusted community members who can help families make sure their children are getting school-required vaccinations before the first day of kindergarten. Below are some CDC resources that can help young children stay up-to-date with their vaccinations and ready for kindergarten:

- [Facts about routine vaccines](#), including that [vaccines are safe](#)
- [Frequently asked questions for routine immunizations](#)
- [State and Territory Immunization Websites | CDC](#)
- [Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning | CDC](#)

How to Use this Toolkit:

To support partners in this effort, and to help ECE providers communicate with families, CDC developed a playbook, [Let's RISE \(Routine Immunizations on Schedule for Everyone\)](#), that contains evidence-based strategies, resources, and data to get routine immunization coverage to [Healthy People 2030](#) target coverage rates. This toolkit was developed by the [Public Health Foundation \(PHF\)](#) in collaboration with CDC and with input from the [Administration for Children and Families \(ACF\)](#), [National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety \(NCHBHS\)](#), [National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\)](#), [Pennsylvania State University Extension - Better Kid Care](#), and [Child Care Aware of America](#). It is a companion resource that brings together additional actionable tools that can be used by ECE providers to get childhood vaccination rates back to coverage levels needed to protect communities against vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks. Resources contained in this toolkit are compiled from professional organizations, state and local health departments, public health partners, national and international governmental organizations, and academic institutions supporting early care and education (Appendix A). Jurisdiction-specific resources are included as examples of tools and communication materials that are currently being used to get young children caught up on routine vaccines.

The toolkit is organized around five evidence-based strategies ECE providers can support for strengthening vaccination coverage; 1) make parents and families aware of your state immunization [licensing requirements](#) and your program's vaccination policy; 2) share immunization information during enrollment and kindergarten readiness communications; 3) prepare ECE program health professionals (when applicable) to answer questions and concerns; 4) send reminders to alert families when additional immunizations are or will be needed; 5) expand access to immunization services for staff and children by sharing information about where qualified families can access free routine childhood vaccinations.

All ECE providers can use these strategies and resources regardless of setting (e.g., center-based childcare, family childcare, Head Start, or other early learning, early intervention and preschool/pre-kindergarten programs delivered in schools, homes, or other settings). Resources in this toolkit can be downloaded, adapted, and shared with your program or community. They include parent handouts, communication materials such as newsletter blurbs and social media content, conversation guides, and off-site vaccination information.

In addition, the following organizations may be able to assist ECE programs to implement vaccination strategies to strengthen childhood immunization coverage.

- [Local Health Department – NACCHO Directory](#) - Find and contact your local health department to request materials and support. Local health departments play a crucial role in vaccinations by coordinating distribution, organizing vaccination clinics, providing public education, and collaborating with healthcare providers to ensure efficient and widespread vaccine coverage within the community.
- [Child Care Resource and Referral Agency \(CCR&R\) - Directory](#) - CCR&R can assist childcare providers with resources for their business including vaccination.
- [Child Care Health Consultant \(CCHC\) - Directory](#) - CCHCs are health professionals with education and experience in child and community health who can support your ECE programs by increasing staff knowledge on health issues and improving compliance with best practices.

- Child Care Aware of America ECE professionals, including directors, educators and Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) staff, can request [technical assistance](#) on childcare vaccination best practices.
- [National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety](#) - NCHBHS designs evidence-based resources and delivers innovative training and technical assistance to build the capacity of Head Start and other early childhood programs. ECE providers can request technical assistance on early childhood vaccination best practices from NCHBHS at health@ecetta.info.

About PHF

The Public Health Foundation (PHF) is a national, non-profit organization whose mission is to advance the public health workforce to achieve organizational excellence. For more information, visit phf.org.

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Table of Contents

Additional Immunization-Related Toolkits for Early Care and Education
Providers6

Strategy 1. Make parents and families aware of state immunization
licensing requirements and your program’s vaccination policy7

Strategy 2. Share immunization information during enrollment and
kindergarten readiness communications8

Strategy 3. Prepare ECE program health professionals (when applicable)
to answer questions and concerns..... 11

Strategy 4. Establish a policy and send reminders to alert families when
additional immunizations are or will be needed..... 12

Strategy 5. Expand access to immunization services for staff and children
..... 13

Immunization-Related Training and Continuing Education for ECE
Providers 14

Appendix..... 16

Additional Immunization-Related Toolkits for Early Care and Education Providers

- The Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center resources on [Child immunizations | ECLKC \(hhs.gov\)](#) provide information on immunizations and vaccines for children, including when children need them and why they are important.
- The [Childhood Vaccinations: A Toolkit for Child Care and Early Learning Providers in Washington State](#), developed by the [Public Health – Seattle & King County](#), provides materials and resources to help ECE providers promote childhood vaccines, answer family questions, and more. While this resource is specific to the state of Washington, many of the materials can be downloaded, adapted, and/or utilized by childcare facilities and schools outside of the state of Washington. **This toolkit is also available in:** [Chinese](#) | [Russian](#) | [Somali](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Ukrainian](#) | [Vietnamese](#)
- The [New Jersey Hot Shots for Tots Immunization Campaign](#) is an example of an innovative, point-based incentive program designed to empower ECE providers to develop and implement effective best practices to maintain and/or improve immunization coverage rates. Check with your state, territorial, tribal, and [local health department](#) to see what immunization activities exist in your area and get involved!
- The spread of COVID-19 has highlighted opportunities to improve collaboration between local health departments and early care and education programs. The [National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\)](#) designed a COVID-19 mitigation checklist, [Supporting Early Care and Education Programs with COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies](#), to strengthen and highlight engagement between ECE providers and families.

For additional state specific resources and communication assets, check with your local [health department](#).

Strategy 1

Make parents and families aware of state immunization licensing requirements and your program's vaccination policy

CDC encourages ECE providers to foster a culture of immunization by sharing the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended [childhood immunization schedule](#) and your facility's vaccination policy widely with staff via staff trainings and current and perspective families via other communication avenues used to convey information about your program (e.g. ECE program website or bulletin board).

Vaccines on CDC's [childhood immunization schedule](#) are recommended to protect infants, children, and adolescents against vaccine-preventable diseases. States may opt to require some of these recommended vaccines to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases for certain people and situations. [Vaccination requirements](#) for children attending ECE programs [vary by state or territory](#). [Visit your state or local health department website for information on vaccination requirements for your jurisdiction](#).

Early Childhood and Education Immunization Policy Template

ECE providers can download, adapt, and develop/update your own early childhood immunization policy using these sample templates. Policies should require proof of immunization from a licensed medical professional or valid documentation from a state immunization registry. Consider also including sending reminders to alert families when additional immunizations are or will be needed in your program immunization policy.

- [Model Child Care Health Policies - American Academy of Pediatrics and Early Childhood Education Linkage System \(ECELS\)](#)
- [Childcare Immunization Policy Template - North Carolina Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center](#)



Strategy 2

Share immunization information during enrollment and kindergarten readiness communications

Childcare enrollment and kindergarten readiness communications are a great opportunity to encourage vaccination awareness, share vaccination requirements, and provide facts about vaccines with current and prospective families. CDC recommends increasing awareness about the benefits of all ACIP [recommended vaccines](#), including highlighting those required for kindergarten. Below are resources that you can download, adapt, and share with your community in-person, on your websites, or through your social media channels.

Parent Handouts

ECE providers can share facts and answer frequently asked questions about childhood vaccines by including links to vaccine handouts in digital communications or by printing and sharing copies of handouts with families directly.

NOTE: ECE providers should direct families to their child's healthcare providers if they have questions about these handouts or vaccination.

Factsheets

- [Reliable Sources of Immunization Information: Where Parents Can Go to Find Answers - Immunize.org](#)
- [Vaccines Your Child Needs by Age 6 - American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [Vaccine Safety: Get the Facts - American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [Top Ten Reasons to Protect Your Child by Vaccinating - Immunize.org](#)
- [Family Vaccine Booklet - Voices for Vaccines](#)
- [Did You Know Your Child Can Get Free Vaccines? - CDC Factsheet](#)
- [Addressing Vaccination Anxiety for Infants and Toddlers Strategies for Parents and Caregivers - Immunize.org](#)
- [10 Ways to Separate Vaccine Fact from Fiction - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Protecting Our Children and Youth from COVID-19: Information for Parents, Caregivers and Community Partners FACT SHEET - CDC](#)

Helping Families Make Shots Less Stressful

- [Taking Fear and Pain Out of Needles—for Your Child and You - HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [Make Shots Less Stressful - CDC](#)
- [How to Hold Your Child During Vaccination - CDC](#)

Digital and Social Media Assets

ECE providers can browse, upload, and post these shareable images, sample social media messages, and infographics for families on your facility or school website and/or social media channels.

- [#Dont Wait Vaccinate Infants and Toddlers - California Immunization Coalition](#)
- [The Power to Protect Campaign: Digital and Social Media Toolkit 2023 - Learning First Alliance](#)
- [Fight Flu-Don't Let it Stop You - CDC](#)
- [Spread the Word - Get My Flu Shot - Ad Council](#)
- [Social Media Assets for Flu Prevention - Families Fighting Flu Inc.](#)
- [Social Media | Protecting our Children and Youth from COVID-19 – CDC](#)
- [National Infant Immunization Week 2024 - Vaccinate Your Family](#)

Posters/Flyers

- [Grow up healthy! - CDC](#)
- [CDC Digital Media Toolkit: 2023-2024 Flu Season - CDC](#)
- [Centro de Recursos para socios contra la influenza estacional - CDC](#)
- [Vaccines for Children - 20 years of Protecting America's children - CDC](#)

Bookmarks/Stickers

- [Flu Awareness Bookmarks and Stickers - Families Fighting Flu Inc.](#)

Robo Call and Robo Text Messages

- [Text Messages to Encourage COVID-19 Vaccination - COVID.gov](#)

Translated Materials

- Protect Your Child with Vaccines – Head Start ECLKC
 - **Available in:** [English](#) | [Spanish \(español\)](#) | [Arabic \(العربية\)](#) | [Chinese \(中文\)](#) | [Haitian Creole \(Kreyòl ayisyen\)](#) | [Somali \(Af-Soomaali\)](#) | [Vietnamese \(tiếng Việt\)](#)
- Childcare Immunization Charts - Washington State Department of Health
 - **Available in:** [English \(PDF\)](#) | [Español -Spanish \(PDF\)](#) | [中文 - Chinese \(PDF\)](#) | [العربية - Arabic \(PDF\)](#) | [Русский - Russian \(PDF\)](#) | [Af-soomaali - Somali \(PDF\)](#) | [Українська - Ukrainian \(PDF\)](#) | [Tiếng Việt - Vietnamese \(PDF\)](#)
- Vaccinations for Infants and Children, Age 0-10 Years - immunize.org
 - **Available in:** [English](#) | [Arabic](#) | [Chinese-Simplified](#) | [French](#) | [Korean](#) | [Russian](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Vietnamese](#)

- Fact Sheets | Protecting Our Children and Youth from COVID-19 - CDC
 - **Available in:** [English](#) | [Español](#) | [Chinese - 简体中文](#) | [Vietnamese - Tiếng Việt](#) | [Korean - 한국어](#) | [Tagalog](#) | [Arabic - العربية](#) | [Khmer - ខ្មែរ](#)
- National Infant Immunization Week 2024 Graphics Dropbox – Vaccinate Your Family
Available in: [English](#) | [Español](#)

Strategy 3

Prepare ECE program health professionals (when applicable) to answer questions and concerns

As trusted messengers, how ECE providers talk to parents, guardians, and families about vaccines is a crucial component of improving vaccine coverage, increasing vaccine confidence, and building trust. ECE providers should direct family questions to the child's healthcare provider. When applicable, ECE health professionals, including onsite nurses, can use these resources to talk to families about routine vaccines and promote health literacy.

Conversation Guides for Building Vaccine Confidence

These resources offer tips and techniques to support more productive conversations and communications about getting kids vaccinated. While some were developed for COVID-19 vaccines, the strategies can be used for all vaccines.

- [Talking with vaccine hesitant people - Voices for Vaccines](#)
- [How to talk about vaccines - World Health Organization](#)
- [Reframing the Conversation About Child and Adolescent Vaccinations - American Academy of Pediatrics and FrameWorks Institute](#)
- [Guiding Conversations About COVID-19 Vaccines for Young Children - ECLKC](#)

Responding to Frequently Asked Questions

These resources offer information and communication strategies that ECE providers can go to for guidance in crafting responses to parents/guardians frequently asked questions about vaccines.

- [Frequently Asked Questions - Voices for Vaccines](#)
- [Answers to Your Most Common Questions about Childhood Vaccines - CDC](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ - Child Care Aware of America](#)

Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation

These resources offer credible websites, organizations, and communication strategies that ECE providers can go to for guidance on crafting responses to misinformation and disinformation.

- [Need Help Responding to Vaccine-Hesitant Parents? - Immunize.org](#)
- [Vaccine Hesitancy Toolkit - Voices for Vaccines](#)
- [Vaccine Misinformation Guide - UNICEF](#)
- [Vaccines and Immunization: Myths and Misconceptions - World Health Organization](#)
- [Vaccines: The Myths and the Facts - American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology](#)

Strategy 4

Establish a policy and send reminders to alert families when additional immunizations are or will be needed

It is critical that ECE providers understand [state, territorial, tribal, and local vaccination requirements](#). ECE providers can use immunization reminders to help encourage families to speak with their child's healthcare provider and make sure their child is up-to-date on all required vaccinations.



Sample Letters

ECE providers can contact their [state, territorial, tribal](#), or [local health department](#) to see whether they have sample notification letters. ECE providers can also download, adapt, and brand these letters with their childcare program logo for dissemination

- [Childcare Center Vaccination Catch-Up Letter - California Immunization Coalition](#)
- [4 Year-Old Immunization Reminder-Sample Letter – Washington State Department of Health](#)
- [Sample Parent Letters \(See page 9\) - Michigan Association for Local Public Health](#)
- [Sample Letter to Parents - New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Notice of Immunizations Needed Letter Template - California Department of Public Health](#)
- [Flu Free Washington Email Templates - Washington State Department of Health](#)

Reminder Postcards

- [Reminder and Recall Strategies - American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [COVID-19 Reminder/Recall Postcard Templates - Association of Immunization Managers](#)

Strategy 5

Expand access to immunization services for staff and children

ECE providers can help make vaccination easy and accessible for staff and families by sharing free tools to assist parents in planning their child's well visits and information about where qualified families can access free routine childhood vaccinations as well as adult COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

ECE programs can also expand access to vaccines by partnering with vaccinators that can offer mobile clinics onsite or offsite community vaccination days. This can help ensure that children and staff are up-to-date on all ACIP recommended vaccines. While some resources below were developed for COVID-19 vaccines, the strategies can be used for all vaccines.



Free Vaccines for Children

- Factsheet: [Did You Know Your Child Can Get Free Vaccines? - CDC](#)
- Factsheet: [School-Based Health Centers \(for Parents\) - Nemours KidsHealth](#)
- Check with your [health department](#) to see if they have a list or map of Vaccines for Children (VFC) provider sites

Vaccine Locators - To help ECE staff and families find convenient vaccination locations

- Find a [community health center](#) near you
- [Vaccines.gov - Search for COVID19 vaccine locations](#)
- [Vaccines.gov - Search for flu vaccine locations](#)

Well Child Visit Planner - Free planning resources that helps parents **plan** for all 15 age-specific well visits from your child's first week of life to age 6

- [Well Visit Planner – The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative](#)

Community Vaccination Days - Contact, or use relationships with, local immunization programs and state, territorial, tribal, and local [health departments](#) to determine if they can offer community vaccination days during the week(s) prior to the first day of preschool and kindergarten.

Immunization-Related Training and Continuing Education for ECE Providers

Immunization training opportunities, online courses, and webinars can help ECE providers expand their knowledge and skills in advocating for on-time routine vaccination and navigating conversations about vaccines with families. All trainings listed are based on the vaccine recommendations made by ACIP.

Better Kid Care – Pennsylvania State University Extension:

- [Supporting the Child Vaccination Decision Process \(online course\)](#)
 - Learn information about the science behind and benefits of childhood vaccines to more fully engage with families as they make decisions regarding their children's health.
 - Available in Spanish: [Apoyo al Proceso de Decisión de Vacunación Infantil](#)
 - Open the [link](#) to your state or territory to see if Better Kid Care's On Demand courses are approved to meet professional development requirements *specific to your area*.
- [Navigating Conversations with Families About Childhood Vaccines \(webinar\)](#)
 - View the webinar recording, handouts, and slides looking at why these conversations are uncomfortable at times and how professionals can approach them in ways that stay true to fact-based information while also preserving their valued relationships with families.
- [Community Strategies for Vaccine Equity for Young Children \(webinar\)](#)
 - View the webinar recording, handouts, and slides focusing on effective strategies for advancing vaccine equity for young children in early childhood programs.

Childcare Aware of America

- [It's the Season: Staying Healthy and Up-to-Date on Vaccines \(Flu, COVID-19 and RSV\) \(webinar\)](#)
 - This webinar discusses the increasing rates of respiratory illnesses such as flu, RSV, and COVID-29, the vaccines for preventing the spread of these viruses, and how to promote vaccines to ensure healthy childcare.

Head Start – Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center

- [Vaccines and Developmental Milestones \(webinar\)](#)
 - This webinar includes information on the importance of on-time vaccination and how developmental screening is key to promoting children's healthy development.
- [Getting Up to Date with Childhood Immunizations \(webinar\)](#)
 - This webinar explains how staff can help families understand the benefits of vaccines to make it easier for children to stay up-to-date with immunizations.

Wyoming Department of Public Health

- [How Your Child Care Program Can Support Immunization: Training for Early Care and Education Program Administrators \(PowerPoint slides\)](#)
 - This downloadable and adaptable training will help participants understand the role that immunizations play in early childhood development, describe vaccine-preventable diseases that commonly occur in childcare settings, and describe ways that their childcare program can support immunization.

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education

- [Caring for our Children \(CFOC\) Online Standards Database](#)
 - This is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practices for today's early care and education settings
 - [Standard 7.2.0.1: Immunization Documentation for Children](#)
 - [Standard 7.2.0.2: Unimmunized/Under-immunized Children](#)
 - [Standard 7.2.0.3: Immunization of Staff](#)

Thank You

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Early care and education organizations

- Child Care Aware of America
- Early Childhood Education Linkage System
- Learning First Alliance
- National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety
- National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education
- Nemours KidsHealth
- North Carolina Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center
- The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative

Public health professional organizations and partners

- Ad Council
- Association of Immunization Managers
- American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- California Department of Public Health
- California Immunization Coalition
- Families Fighting Flu, Inc.
- FrameWorks Institute
- Immunize.org
- Michigan Association for Local Public Health
- National Association of County and City Health Officials
- New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
- New Jersey Department of Health
- Public Health – Seattle & King County
- Vaccinate Your Family
- Voices for Vaccines
- Washington State Department of Health
- Wyoming Department of Health

National and international governmental organizations

- Administration for Children & Families
- Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center
- Health Resources and Services Administration
- UNICEF
- United States Department of Health and Human Services
- World Health Organization

Universities

- Pennsylvania State University Extension - Better Kid Care

ⁱ Sinclair, D. et al. 2019. Forecasted Size of Measles Outbreaks Associated with Vaccination Exemptions for School children. *JAMA*. 2(8):e199768. doi:[10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.976](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.976)

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ⁱⁱⁱ Hill HA, Yankey D, Elam-Evans LD, Chen M, Singleton JA. Vaccination Coverage by Age 24 Months Among Children Born in 2019 and 2020 — National Immunization Survey-Child, United States, 2020–2022. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2023;72:1190–1196. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7244a3>

^{iv} Seither R, Calhoun K, Yusuf OB, et al. Vaccination Coverage with Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten — United States, 2021–22 School Year. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2023;72:26–32. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7202a2>

^v Minta AA, Ferrari M, Antoni S, et al. Progress Toward Measles Elimination — Worldwide, 2000–2022. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2023;72:1262–1268. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7246a3>