

Questions Received During IACW Quarterly Meeting: 4/29/20/20

General Vaccine Related:

Q: Will the Washington State Department of Health vaccine selection window be postponed until October?

A: Yes, vaccine choice is delayed.

Due to the increasing response and precautions taken because of COVID-19 DOH is going to postpone the Spring Vaccine Choice period. This decision comes knowing many provider offices are closed currently for regular operations and may only be addressing urgent medical issues. Other providers are closed completely for unknown periods. DOH does not want to add an extra burden to provider offices highly engaged with COVID-19 response or who are closed to make a choice on which vaccines they prefer to use. With the uncertainty of how long the response and closures will be, they cannot give a date at this time for when vaccine choice will occur.

For more information:

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WADOH/bulletins/2840c85>

Q: How do you think the pandemic will impact telemedicine and vaccines/well visits? Can a provider do a virtual well visit and drive by vaccines? Are other models getting looked at to encourage parents to continue well visits and immunizations - including what you mentioned - office hours/locations changes for well vs. sick?

A: (From Neil Kaneshiro, MD) The pandemic HAS changed well visits and use of telemedicine. As you are all well aware, all office visits to physicians have had significant decreases due to the pandemic. There is a lot of patient fear of being exposed at the office. Providers are allowed to do telemedicine sick and well visits right now. Obviously, this is not ideal since you cannot do a proper physical exam and need to rely on parental measurements of growth. We are targeting older kids for this where measurements are not as critical for most and fewer immunizations needed since you can do those through Zoom meetings.

Some providers are doing drive by immunizations, though it is not clear to me how much better that is for the patient then just coming into the office. There are actually very few sick kids out there right now. Turns out social distancing for prevention of coronavirus also works for all the other typical childhood illnesses like strep throat, colds, sinus infections, pink eye, croup, flu, etc...

Primarily the message to the public should be that immunizations are very important and babies and children should get their immunizations in on time if possible. Provider offices are doing a good job of protecting the patients who come in through scheduling and timing or location of well child visits. The risk while not zero, is quite low with precautions being taken and the risk is decreasing over time as cases of coronavirus drift downward.

For resources on providing immunizations during COVID-19 please visit:

<https://immunitycommunitywa.org/covid-19-and-immunizations/>

Q: Where can I access MyIR (online immunization records) handouts for parents?

A: You can download handouts in English and Spanish here:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/348-519-WA-MyIR-card.pdf>

(Spanish on second page), or e-mail immunematerials@doh.wa.gov to order.

New School Rules Implementation:

Q: Will all immunization requirements be upheld for the start of school?

A: The Department of Health is working to implement changes to school and childcare immunization rules that were passed by the State Board of Health and are scheduled to take effect August 1, 2020. These rules include requiring records to be medically verified, changing the Tdap requirement from 6th to 7th grade, and clarifying the definition of “conditional status.”

The state’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic will not affect the date these rule changes go into effect. We are concerned with a drop in the number of vaccines administered to Washington children in recent months, and slowing or stopping immunizations increases our risk for outbreaks of other diseases.

Immunizations will help protect children from vaccine preventable diseases as schools and child cares begin reopening. While we understand some children may not have had the same access to immunization visits that they typically have, we also know providers are making clinics safe for families to visit. We encourage providers to ask patients who have missed well-child and vaccination appointments to come in so children can get caught up and are ready to enter school and child care.

Policy:

Q: Next year will we be putting forth stronger laws around exemptions?

A: (From Carrie Glover, WithinReach Policy Consultant) There is a lot that is still be determined that will shape the policies pursued during the 2021 legislative session. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, public health will likely be a significant topic before the legislature. But public health advocates are very focused on COVID response at the moment. Other policy approaches are still being discussed and will likely depend greatly on the political, economic, and public health landscape when session begins in January.