



For Immediate Release

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In 2019, Vaccine-Preventable Diseases Resulted in \$1.1 Billion in Healthcare Charges in Colorado. In Early 2020, Childhood Vaccination Rates Dropped by as Much as 82%. What Could This Mean for 2021?

As COVID-19 precautions ease up and kids return to in-person learning, low vaccination coverage could lead to outbreaks of diseases like measles and pertussis – and add millions more to health care costs.

AURORA, Colo. – In 2019, healthcare charges to treat vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) like measles, flu and whooping cough in Colorado adults and children reached \$1.1 billion. That was before COVID-19 emerged. The same year, vaccine-preventable diseases were the culprit in over 14,000 hospitalizations and emergency department (ED) visits in children, and over 20,000 in adults. That's according to a new independent report jointly released today by Children's Hospital Colorado (Children's Colorado) and Immunize Colorado.

[The Vaccine-Preventable Diseases Report](#), prepared by researchers in the Department of Epidemiology at Children's Colorado, examines CDC National Immunization Survey data and 2019 Colorado Hospital Association inpatient and emergency department data to determine the health and economic burdens resulting from VPDs in Colorado. According to the report, the economic toll of VPDs is highest for publicly insured and uninsured children and adults, with hospitalizations and ED visit charges for these groups totaling over \$900 million in 2019.

The report also finds that only 64% of Colorado's children born in 2017 were fully vaccinated by age two, ranking our state 43rd in the nation. By age 35 months, the rate bumps up slightly to 78%—still well below national goals. This likely explains why, for children, ED visit and hospitalization rates for VPDs (excluding influenza) are highest during the first three years of life when on-time vaccination rates are lowest. As the report notes, “under-vaccination early in life leaves children vulnerable to serious diseases.”

In 2020, Colorado's already-low childhood vaccination rates dropped further when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Compared to the number of doses delivered January to March 15, doses delivered after March 15 to May were 31% lower for children 0-2 years, 78% lower for 3-9 years, and 82% lower for 10-17 years of age. Although vaccination rates have improved since this initial drop, they have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

“The consequences of this period of under-vaccination may only become clear as pandemic mitigation measures ease up over the next year; low rates could leave children vulnerable to diseases like measles when they head back to in-person learning and when people start traveling more,” said Dr. Jessica Cataldi, the report’s main author and infectious diseases pediatrician at Children’s Hospital Colorado.

In fact, a March 2021 Immunize Colorado [analysis](#) of data from the 2019-20 school year shows nearly 45,000 Colorado students would potentially need to be excluded from school for up to 21 days in the case of a measles outbreak because they’ve either claimed a vaccine exemption (26,830 students) or have an incomplete or missing MMR vaccination record on file (17,834). With the decline in routine vaccination rates, it’s likely the number of potential exclusions jumped even higher during the 2020-21 school year.

As preparation for the next school year begins, getting Colorado’s kids back on track with vaccinations will be critical—especially as they return to in-person learning. Any progress made to bring rates back up could be further delayed if COVID-19 vaccine(s) get approved for children and teens and they’re unable to receive other recommended vaccines like meningococcal and Tdap before heading back to school. Currently, CDC recommends that other vaccines shouldn’t be given within 2 weeks of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“That’s why it’s critical for health care providers to create opportunities for vaccination catch-up *now* and help get kids back on track,” said Dr. Cataldi. “We can’t risk additional disease outbreaks.”

To mitigate this risk in 2021 and beyond, child health care providers can prioritize scheduling well-child visits and vaccine appointments for their patients – and parents can call their child’s provider to schedule them – this spring, before the inevitable back-to-school rush.

Access the full Vaccine-Preventable Diseases report at <https://www.immunizecolorado.org/>.

About Immunize Colorado:

Immunize Colorado is a statewide, independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Its mission is to protect Colorado families, schools and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases. Immunize Colorado does not accept funding from vaccine manufacturers or distributors. To learn more, visit www.immunizecolorado.org and connect with Immunize Colorado on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

About Children’s Hospital Colorado:

Children’s Hospital Colorado is one of the nation’s leading and most expansive pediatric healthcare systems with a mission to improve the health of children through patient care, education, research and advocacy. Founded in 1908 and recognized as a top ten children’s hospital by U.S. News & World Report, Children’s Colorado has established itself as a pioneer in the discovery of innovative and groundbreaking treatments that are shaping the future of pediatric healthcare worldwide. Children’s Colorado offers a full spectrum of family-centered care at its urgent, emergency and specialty care locations throughout Colorado, including its location on the Anschutz Medical Campus, and across the region. In 2019, Children’s Hospital Colorado, Colorado Springs, opened as the first pediatric-only

hospital in southern Colorado. For more information, visit www.childrenscolorado.org, or connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Children's Hospital Colorado complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

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