

A National Review of Successes and Barriers to Pharmacist's Participation in the Vaccines for Children Program

INTRODUCTION

Pharmacies serve as an important community-based access point for vaccinations and have the potential to better serve children by participating in the federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) program. While all 50 states allow for pharmacists to vaccinate adults, not all states allow pharmacies to participate in the VFC program, limiting some patients' ability to easily access the benefits of vaccination. Further, additional barriers such as Differing state laws and regulations, retail pharmacy policies and pharmacists' scope of practice can limit a state's ability to deliver vaccinations to VFC-eligible children through pharmacies. The purpose of this document is to summarize common successes and challenges experienced across the U.S. regarding pharmacists' participation in VFC and delivery of VFC vaccines. Given additional barriers to seeking care due to the COVID-19 pandemic, improving accessibility to vaccination through all pharmacies can be an important step towards preventing additional infectious disease outbreaks and providing the COVID-19 vaccines. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has begun to expand pharmacists' vaccinating power through HHS declarations and new partnerships between the CDC and national pharmacy companies.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

HHS Declaration in the wake of COVID-19 -

In September 2020, the U.S. government enacted an amendment to the PREP Act to expand vaccine access through pharmacies following the drastic drop in immunization rates due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This authorized pharmacists and pharmacy interns to administer all childhood vaccines for children 3 years of age and older. The emergency ruling will also allow qualified pharmacists to administer COVID-19 vaccines when made available. Although the federal government has authorized all pharmacists to be immunization providers, individual states must decide how to enact these new federal rules and regulations and many pharmacists are not yet able to serve in this role. By allowing pharmacists to more broadly vaccinate, they will be seen as routine immunization providers and many more Americans will have access to lifesaving vaccines. (1)

CVS and Walgreens to deliver COVID-19 vaccine -

CVS and Walgreens have a combined 20,000 pharmacies nationwide and many Americans live within a few miles of a local pharmacy. Pharmacies are seen as a pivotal resource for the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccines under the Emergency Use Authorization. In December 2020, CVS Health and Walgreens Boots Alliance have consolidated efforts to vaccinate 3 million residents of long-term care facilities in tier 1A of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan. In Colorado, most long-term care facility residents will be vaccinated through these pharmacy partnerships. Pharmacists will continue to play a key role in the vaccine delivery throughout the remainder of the pandemic by serving a convenient neighborhood vaccinator. (2)

MAJOR FINDINGS

Out of the 52 states and territories (Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico)

34 states allow pharmacists to participate in VFC

22 states have age restrictions on pharmacists' vaccinating power

36 states restrict pharmacists by either a protocol or prescription policy

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS CONT.

Universal Purchase (UP) – States that have adopted UP and the bulk purchasing of vaccines can reduce the burden on providers who have to finance the up-front vaccine costs. Through UP bulk purchasing programs, providers relish in the benefits of a streamlined vaccine delivery chain and having financially risk-free vaccines, which enhances a provider's ability to offer more vaccinations to vulnerable populations who utilize the VFC program. (3)

Lowered Age Restrictions – In 27 states, pharmacists can administer vaccinations at any age, allowing pharmacists to vaccinate younger children. In Alaska, pharmacists can prescribe and administer all ACIP recommended vaccinations without a protocol or prescription to any age group, resulting in higher overall immunization rates. (4)

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Financial Costs – Participating in VFC is often not a financially viable option for pharmacies. Across the country, many VFC providers report that Medicaid reimbursement is inadequate to cover the costs of administering a VFC vaccine. For each vaccine, VFC providers lose approximately \$5-15 dollars. (5)

Administrative Barriers – The high administrative burden of enrolling and participating in VFC can often prevent pharmacists from participating in the program. (6) Once enrolled, pharmacists are required to comply with strict mandates surrounding vaccine storage and reporting. In a 2013 survey, 30% of Kansas VFC providers reported that the high administrative burden and cost of maintaining a separate VFC vaccine stock prevented their continued enrollment in VFC. (7)

Societal Demand – Many VFC pharmacists have struggled with low eligible patient demand. Many families are unaware that pharmacies can provide VFC vaccines or are discouraged from visiting vaccine providers outside of their medical home. As such, a Kansas VFC provider was forced to drop out of the VFC program because there was not enough demand from VFC-eligible children in their area to make staying in the program viable. (8)

**** Pharmacist vaccination regulations differ from state to state and are rapidly changing due to the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine. To find the most up-to-date information, please check your state department of public health page.****

NEXT STEPS



Open Collaboration

Increasing collaboration between state organizations including state Medicaid and state immunization programs is essential to making the VFC program successful



Improve Data Monitoring

Increase data collection at the state and federal level on pharmacists participation in VFC to better understand how to increase vaccine access in the pharmacy setting



Ensure Reimbursement

Coordinate with State VFC and Medicaid to ensure adequate reimbursement for services for pharmacists



Streamline Enrollment

Develop clear guidelines and support for pharmacies as they enroll in the VFC program



Engage Community

Increase demand for pharmacy-delivered vaccinations by advertising VFC vaccination services to families in local community