

Innovative Strategies for Improving Developmental Surveillance and Screening: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic

The American Academy of Pediatrics, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, collected strategies used by 9 pediatric practices across the country to continue delivery of developmental surveillance, screening, referral and follow-up during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This tip sheet highlights lessons learned and innovations, including telehealth, which other pediatric practices may want to consider.

Highlights of Lessons Learned:

- Families/caregivers may need alternate options to access healthcare. Consider offering multiple modalities for appointments and communication e.g., telehealth, telephone, in-person, portal communication.
- Process changes may require trial and error in combination with innovative strategies to accommodate families/caregivers and achieve desired goals.
- Early identification processes involve front desk staff, medical assistants, nurses, pediatricians, and administration. Engage all team members and empower them in their responsibilities and roles to support families/caregivers.
- Find opportunities to enhance and/or utilize existing functions in electronic health record platforms to aid in practice processes, communication, and workflow.
- Be flexible with families and persistent in following up with early intervention (EI) agencies; educate families/caregivers and team members on EI agency operations.

General Practice Modifications:

- Examine your practice workflow to identify opportunities for telehealth integration.
- Proactively work with families/caregivers experiencing inequities/disparities to access in-person care; proactively raise awareness about telehealth options.
- Consider developing [suggested protocols](#) for telehealth visits with families/caregivers, e.g., have a strong internet connection, make sure patient can be seen on camera, quiet room, etc.
- Change office hours, schedules, and visits to accommodate patient populations as needed.
- Expand social media use to engage with and educate families/caregivers about well-child care options.
- Separate type of health visit (sick, well-child) and assess if separations implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic would be helpful in the future.
- Remain up to date on your state/territory billing procedures for telehealth, telephone, and in-person visits.

Developmental Surveillance:

- Use tools and program such as CDC's [milestone checklists](#), [Reach Out and Read](#), [developmental coaching models](#), [Help Me Grow](#), and [Promoting First Relationships](#) to engage families/caregivers in developmental surveillance.
- Utilize innate opportunities to conduct surveillance during telehealth visits e.g., assess the home environment, ask about toys and books. Practice cultural humility and acknowledge that families are sharing their home/family life with you.
- Explain to families/caregivers the importance of monitoring a child's developmental milestones through well-child visits, even during a public health emergency.
- Prompt families/caregivers to share any developmental findings or concerns from early childhood professionals (e.g., preschool teachers, day-care, home visitors).
- Ensure tools and resources shared with families/caregivers are easy to read, culturally appropriate, and available in multiple languages.





Developmental Screening:

- Integrate developmental screeners through a patient portal or email screeners to families/caregivers prior to visit.
- Employ an electronic health record system that permits communication with families/caregivers.
- Encourage and explain to families/caregivers the importance of completing developmental screening tools.
- Utilize staff to help families/caregivers complete screening questionnaires over the phone for a telehealth appointment and explain developmental screening questions.

Referral and Follow-up:

- Assist families/caregivers in contacting the local early intervention program, specialists' offices for diagnostic evaluations, and other agencies/service providers you referred them to.
- Stay up to date on referral agency operations (e.g., in-person or virtual services, expected wait times). Share this information with families/caregivers, so they know what to expect.
- Encourage and explain to families/caregivers the importance of making referral appointments.
- Provide ways for families/caregivers to ask questions and discuss difficulties they may encounter with developmental referrals.
- Recognize that cultural differences may exist in families' concerns about development and developmental delays. Cultural liaisons or family advisors may provide insight on how to communicate developmental screening results and any next steps.

Additional Resources

- [AAP Developmental Surveillance and Screening Webpage](#)
- [Screening Technical Assistance & Resource \(STAR\) Center](#)
- [AAP Telehealth Webpage](#)
- [Family Voices Telehealth Curriculum](#)
- Free PediaLink Courses
 - [Milestones Matter: Don't Underestimate Developmental Surveillance](#)
 - [Building Positive Parenting Skills Across Ages](#)
 - [Identifying and Caring for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Course for Pediatric Clinicians](#)
 - [Providing Telehealth and Distant Care Services in Pediatrics](#)

References

- [Promoting Optimal Development: Identifying Infants and Young Children With Developmental Disorders Through Developmental Surveillance and Screening](#)
- [Identification, Evaluation, and Management of Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [Telehealth: Improving Access to and Quality of Pediatric Health Care](#)
- [Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering With Families and Communities to Promote Relational Health](#)