



# Strengthening Immunization Delivery for Children

## PREPARING FOR A COVID-19 VACCINE

Once a COVID-19 vaccine is available, ensuring that children and adolescents are quickly immunized against the disease will be a crucial component of a national strategy to keep Americans healthy, end social distancing, and strengthen America's economy. However, several obstacles threaten to impede our nation's ability to carry out this essential effort.

Largely driven by online misinformation, an increasing number of parents in recent years have become more hesitant to vaccinate their children according to expert recommendations. Restoring confidence in the safety and effectiveness of childhood vaccines will be crucial to ensuring uptake of a COVID-19 vaccine.

In addition, childhood vaccination rates have experienced sharp declines resulting from COVID-19-related stay-at-home orders. In the coming months, pediatricians will be called upon to respond to an influx of children returning to catch up on their routine vaccines. This fall, they will need to vaccinate children against influenza in what will be an especially critical flu season

and will need to prepare for the widespread delivery of a COVID-19 vaccine.

However, primary care pediatrician practices—the centerpiece of the child vaccine delivery system in the United States—have experienced severe economic stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These practices must remain financially solvent to carry out the important social responsibility of child vaccination in tandem with performing the essential function of providing primary health care to children.

A national policy strategy is needed to keep childhood vaccination strong and end the COVID-19 epidemic.



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### Increase Vaccine Rates and Confidence

**Encourage the safe return of children to their medical homes.** Pediatricians have responded to COVID-19 by redesigning their practices to make them especially safe places for children and families. Communications efforts are urgently needed to ensure that parents know that vaccination and well-child care is safe and essential.

**Pass the VACCINES Act.** The VACCINES Act is a bipartisan bill that would help provide resources to the Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) to appropriately monitor vaccine hesitancy and promote vaccine confidence through public messaging campaigns.

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### Bolster the Vaccine Delivery System

*Pediatricians are the backbone of the immunization delivery infrastructure for children. Yet, in many cases pediatric practices must shoulder the expensive upfront financial burden of purchasing, storing, and delivering vaccines. Payment to pediatricians for administering vaccines—often through the Medicaid program—is often inadequate.*

**Ease the financial burdens of vaccine administration on pediatric practices.** For the duration of the public health emergency, Medicaid vaccine administration payments should be significantly increased. Congress should fully fund states to significantly enhance Medicaid vaccine payment rates for two years. Longstanding undervaluation of certain vaccine payment codes must also be addressed.

**Strengthen the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program.** The VFC is an important program that finances the purchase of vaccines for certain eligible children. Yet, administrative and payment hurdles too often force providers to end participation in the program. Incentive payments to VFC are needed to maintain practice participation and administrative barriers must be reduced.