

# Vaccination Guidance for Providers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

**The Washington Department of Health encourages providers in ambulatory care settings to continue vaccinating patients**, especially infants, pregnant women and older adults, who are at higher risk of getting diseases that vaccines can prevent. Slowing or stopping access to immunizations increases our risk to outbreaks of other diseases.

Stay-at-home orders from the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a decline in clinic visits and [fewer vaccine doses being administered](#). Health care providers should **identify children who have missed well-child visits and/or recommended vaccinations** and contact them to schedule in-person appointments to align with [changes to school and child care/preschool immunization requirements](#) starting August 1, 2020 in Washington state.

Things for health care providers to consider:

- Risks to patients around possible exposure to COVID-19 when they come in for vaccinations and well child visits.
- Strategies in clinic operations to mitigate these risks.
- Local level of COVID-19 illnesses and how many sick patients come to your clinic.

Because of personal, practice or community circumstances related to COVID-19, some providers might not be able to provide well child visits, including provision of immunizations, for all patients in their practice. **If a practice can provide only limited well child visits, health care providers should prioritize newborn care and vaccination of infants and young children (through 24 months of age) when possible.**

## Safe ways to give vaccines while protecting patients and staff:

- Limit well visits to early morning and use the rest of the day for sick visits.
- Dedicate specific clinics, buildings, or rooms for sick visits and for well visits.
- Offer vaccinations at specific times of the day.
- Offer drive-up vaccination clinics if possible. For help setting up a mobile clinic or outdoor vaccination area, see the Immunization Action Coalition of Washington's [Mobile Immunizations Toolkit](#).
- Hang signs requiring people to [wear recommended face coverings](#) they bring from home, or offer face masks if needed. Masks are not recommended for children under the age of two years.
- Clinic staff should wear a medical facemask at all times.
- Use pre-visit communication to give safety instructions, such as phone and text appointment reminders or patient portals if available.

- Reduce [crowding in waiting rooms](#) by asking patients to remain outside (e.g., stay in their vehicles, if applicable) until they are called inside for their appointment.
- Screen staff, patients, and visitors for fever and [symptoms of COVID-19](#) before they enter the facility.
- Reach out to patients and ask those who have had contact with a person with COVID-19 in the last 14 days to call before their clinic appointment.
- Lower the number of patients on site at any one time. Close waiting rooms or registration areas and have patients check in by phone from the parking lot.
- Use different entrances in your clinic for sick and well patients.
- Clearly mark entrances for patients who are high risk for COVID-19.
- Encourage sick patients to stay home and not visit the clinic.
- Tell patients who are ill to use telemedicine or a phone call. Some chronic conditions may be safely managed by a phone consult or telemedicine visit.
- Exam patients by car visit. Tell patients to drive to the clinic and wait in their car while staff go outside to check on them.
- Administer vaccines to people in their car.
- Screen all patients and caregivers for high-risk symptoms.

## Vaccinate Pregnant Women on Schedule during the Pandemic

It is safe and recommended to give flu and Tdap vaccinations to pregnant women during the COVID-19 outbreak. These vaccines protect them from serious diseases that can affect both them and their baby. This practice is supported by the CDC and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

We know clinics in many communities have reduced the number of routine preventive care visits they offer to adhere to social distancing guidelines. But routine adult vaccinations, including vaccinations during pregnancy, can be given as recommended if a patient comes in for another reason. Flu vaccine can be given at any visit during the pregnancy and Tdap between 27 and 36 weeks of gestation.

ACOG offers more information about [supporting your pregnant patients during the COVID-19 outbreak](#).

## Additional Infection Control Measures

Implement infection control measures before patient arrival, upon arrival, throughout the visit, and until fully cleaned and disinfected. The CDC and DOH urge you to consider these additional safety measures while offering immunizations in your clinic during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Urge importance of hand hygiene for staff, patients and visitors that includes the use of soap and water, or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Use barriers to limit contact with patients at triage.
- Areas with medium to high activity are more likely to encounter asymptomatic patients with COVID-19. If COVID-19 is NOT suspected in a patient (based on symptom and exposure history), providers should follow [Standard Precautions](#). With increased risk of

potential transmission, such as vaccinating a crying child, staff are recommended to wear a disposable surgical mask, gloves and eye protection.

- Eye protection is optional in areas with low to no local activity. Use [eye protection](#) based on [level of community transmission](#):
  - Medium to high: Wear eye protection given the increased chance of contact with asymptomatic COVID-19 patients.
  - Low to none: Universal eye protection is considered optional, unless otherwise stated as a part of [Standard Precautions](#).
- Respirators should be used when a higher level of protection is needed, such as during an aerosol generating procedure, including those that aerosolize saliva, mucus, or secretions from eyes; or that cause increased or forced breathing, coughs, sneezes, or yawning.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE), including a respirator, gown, gloves, and eye protection for patients requiring [Airborne Precautions](#) or for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
- Follow respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette principles.
- Handle, clean and disinfect patient care equipment and instruments/devices before use each day, after each use, and at the end of the day.
- Clean and disinfect the environment before first use, and after each patient is seen.
- Follow safe injection practices and proper vaccine storage and handling practices.
- Additional considerations for vaccine administration:
  - Intranasal or oral vaccines:
    - Providers should wear gloves when giving intranasal or oral vaccines because of the increased chance of coming into contact with a patient's mucous membranes and body fluids. Change gloves between patients along with performing proper hand hygiene.
    - Administration of these vaccines is not considered an [aerosol-generating procedure](#), so the use of an N95 or higher-level respirator is not recommended.
  - Intramuscular or subcutaneous vaccines:
    - [If gloves are worn during vaccine administration](#), they should be changed between patients along with performing proper hand hygiene.

## COVID-19 Immunization Resources from CDC

- [Printable posters for essential businesses](#)
- [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in Healthcare Settings](#) (CDC)
- [Infection Control FAQs](#) (CDC)
- [Ways to Operate Effectively webpage](#) (CDC)
- [Infection Control Recommendations webpage](#) (CDC)
- [Recommendations for Ambulatory Care Settings](#) (CDC)

- [Framework for Healthcare Systems Providing Non-COVID-19 Clinical Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(CDC\)](#)
- [“Interim Guidance for Immunization Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic” \(CDC\)](#)
- [Which Mask for Which Task: COVID-19 Prevention at Work](#) (Washington Labor & Industries)

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up to date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Gov. Jay Inslee’s proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

**Have more questions about COVID-19?** Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.