

Immunization Policy Statement

POSITION

ASTHO supports equitable access to safe, effective, and evidence-based immunizations for all people to ensure optimal protection against vaccine-preventable disease. Sustaining high vaccine coverage levels in children and adolescents, increasing coverage rates in adults, effectively communicating the safety and value of vaccines, and incorporating new vaccines into the routinely recommended immunization schedule requires vigilance and sustained, targeted resources. ASTHO also supports policies that strengthen state and territorial immunization policies and programs.

BACKGROUND/EVIDENCE BASE

Immunizations are one of the most significant public health achievements of the past 100 years,¹ a vital component of primary healthcare, a highly cost-effective means of health promotion,⁴ and a powerful tool to prevent and control infectious disease outbreaks in the U.S.² Worldwide, vaccines have made more than 20 life-threatening diseases preventable and saved \$44 in societal/medical costs for every \$1 spent.² Despite this achievement, vaccine coverage has declined for certain people. Since COVID-19 emerged, 25 million children globally have missed one or more routine vaccinations.² Variability in availability and uptake of COVID-19 vaccine coverage exacerbated health disparities and inequities for vulnerable and marginalized populations.³ While public health continues to plan for and respond to emerging infectious diseases, immunization must be recognized as a crucial tool for disease prevention and population health.

By and large, state and territorial health agencies (S/THAs) oversee vaccine requirements for entry into schools, nursing homes, post-secondary institutions, and child-care, healthcare, and correctional facilities. This policy statement provides practical recommendations for S/THAs and partners to advance vaccine laws and regulations that increase vaccine uptake, reduce vaccine hesitancy, and protect the most vulnerable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ASTHO recommends the following actions state and territorial health officials (S/THOs) can take to strengthen immunization policies:

Financing. In addition to federal immunization programs (e.g., Vaccines for Children, Section 317 Immunization Grant Program), several S/THAs operate programs that help provide vaccines for both children and adults. To ensure adequate resources for S/THA immunization programs, ASTHO supports the following principles:

- Advocate for and implement increased, stable, and sustainable federal funding that (1) supports the infrastructure necessary for a successful vaccine delivery system, (2) meets the growing cost of vaccines, (3) ensures continued research and development at the federal level, and (4) provides sustainable safety-net coverage for children and adults without adequate health insurance, such as a vaccine for adults program led by CDC.

Summary of Recommendations

- Advocate for stable, and sustainable federal **financing** to support the broad public health infrastructure necessary for vaccine access and delivery.
- Ensure equitable vaccine **access and delivery** to marginalized and vulnerable populations with a targeted strategy to reduce disparities in immunization coverage rates.
- Strengthen **collaboration** between federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal governments to develop an effective and coordinated vaccination plan.
- Support research and evaluation of the **safety and efficacy** of existing vaccines to inform evidence-based policy implementation.
- Implement tailored risk communication strategies to address vaccine **misinformation and education**.
- Integrate and improve **immunization information systems** that support exchange between private providers and public health professionals.

- Ensure that federal funding for immunization programs is distributed equitably to grantees based on four criteria—need, capacity, performance, and population—using a methodology developed with state and territorial input.

Access and Delivery. S/THAs play a critical role in building partnerships that ensure vaccines are accessible. To enhance access to vaccines, ASTHO supports the following principles:

- Assess and implement evidence-based strategies to improve and sustain immunization coverage levels that can be adapted to state, territorial, tribal, and local needs—especially to reduce disparities in immunization coverage rates.
- Foster S/THA partnerships with a range of providers (e.g., pharmacies, schools, workplaces, clinical sites) to support suitable alternative venues for vaccination, recognizing that every person may not be reliably linked to a healthcare provider.
- Ensure quality improvement using the [Immunization Quality Improvement for Provider](#) (IQIP) program.

Safety and Effectiveness. S/THAs implement several approaches to establish trust with both the public and partners. To improve and monitor vaccine safety, ASTHO supports the following measures:

- Research and evaluation to improve safety and efficacy of existing vaccines and delivery techniques.
- Distribute information on the risks and benefits of vaccines and the availability of compensation for vaccine-related injuries through the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) for effective and appropriate education efforts by all entities and providers delivering vaccines.

Misinformation and Education. S/THAs play a crucial role in vaccine messaging. To address vaccine hesitancy and implement communication strategies, ASTHO supports the following measure:

- Develop appropriate vaccine safety, monitoring, hesitancy, and risk communication messages, as well as implement systems to monitor and respond to media channels and platforms for misinformation and disinformation, which threaten vaccine uptake.
- Emphasize provider education about the importance of vaccines.

Immunization Information Systems (IIS). IIS are confidential, computerized systems that contain records of individual vaccination status. They offer authorized providers immediate access to child and adult immunization status and history. As a reliable forecasting tool, IIS is an important strategy for increasing vaccine uptake. To support optimal use of IIS, ASTHO supports the following measures:

- Improve IIS to help scaling and integrating several program strategies, including vaccine management, accountability, quality assurance and delivery, consumer information, surveillance, adverse events tracking, assessment, and reporting on adequate demographic variables, especially for marginalized populations.
- Enhance the IIS information exchange through bidirectional communication between authorized users in different states and localities, and between private providers and public health.

POLICY APPROVAL HISTORY

Infectious Disease Policy Committee Approval: May 4, 2023

Board of Directors Approval: June 22, 2023

Policy Expires: June 30, 2026

ASTHO membership supported the development of this policy, which was subsequently approved by the ASTHO Board of Directors. Be advised that the statements are approved as a general framework on the issue at a point in time. Any given state or territorial health official must interpret the issue within the current context of his/her jurisdiction and therefore may not adhere to all aspects of this Policy Statement.

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1. (Centers for Disease Control). "Ten Great Public Health Achievements -- United States, 1900-1999." <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00056796.htm>. Accessed August 16, 2022.
 2. (World Health Organization). "Vaccines and immunization." https://www.who.int/health-topics/vaccines-and-immunization#tab=tab_1. Accessed August 16, 2022.
 3. (Kaiser Family Foundation). "Latest Data on COVID-19 Vaccinations by Race/Ethnicity." <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/latest-data-on-covid-19-vaccinations-by-race-ethnicity/>. Accessed August 25, 2022.
 4. (Health Affairs). "Return On Investment from Childhood Immunization in Low- And Middle-Income Countries, 2011-20." DOI: [10.1377/hlthaff.2015.1086](https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.1086). Accessed January 3, 2023.