

February 7, 2022

Dear Primary Care Provider:

The Vermont Department of Health's Immunization Program appreciates the considerable role primary care offices have had throughout this pandemic. Vermonters are in a better position during this challenging time because of the tireless work of our health care community.

Pfizer-BioNTech recently submitted data to the FDA for approval of COVID-19 vaccination in children ages 6 months through 4 years. The Vaccine and Related Biologic Products Advisory Committee (VRPAC) will [meet on February 15, 2022](#) to discuss the data and send a recommendation to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). The approval process for this new Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is different, and the details of the series, approved ages and timeline are currently unclear. **At this time, the end of February is the earliest the vaccine may be available in Vermont. Guidance for ordering will be forthcoming. Please be on the lookout for this communication.** Our program and the State of Vermont are actively planning for that timeline.

Prepare to Immunize children ages 6 months through 4 years

This phase of COVID-19 vaccination will look very different. The strategy Vermont implemented to rapidly rollout COVID-19 vaccination with other young ages, including school-located clinics, state-run vaccination events and pharmacies, will not be appropriate for this very young cohort. Vaccination efforts for this new age group will be strategically focused to leverage our existing public health infrastructure. Parents and guardians are already talking with pediatric and family physicians about COVID-19 vaccines for kids under 5, and primary care offices will play a vital role in ensuring vaccine access to our youngest Vermonters.

After almost two years in the pandemic response, we understand that the health care community is strained. Still, we ask that you start thinking about how your office will serve your youngest patients. The Immunization Program is available if you have any concerns, requests, or creative ideas for partnerships.

Normalize COVID-19 vaccination during patient visits

As a practice enrolled in the Vermont Child Vaccine Program (VCVP) or Vermont Adult Vaccine Program (VAVP) you are familiar with the importance of making vaccines available to your patients. Over 90% of Vermont primary care offices are enrolled to receive and administer the COVID-19 vaccine, though not all locations do so as a part of normal operations. Please begin normalizing the COVID-19 vaccine within your office.

- Maintain a stock of COVID-19 vaccines suitable for the full range of ages you see.
- Assess COVID-19 vaccination status at every patient visit.
- If a COVID-19 vaccine is requested, give the vaccine, even if this results in vaccine waste.
- Develop a system for the 15-minute wait time and ensure this is not a barrier to in-office vaccination.

The Immunization Program is here to help you. We want to hear from you if you are concerned about carrying the COVID-19 vaccine in your office or feel you cannot serve those 6 months through 4 years old when the new pediatric formulation becomes available.

Sincerely, The Immunization Program | Vermont Department of Health



Helpful tips for offering COVID-19 vaccines in your office

The Vermont Department of Health has had many conversations with primary care offices throughout the state. We are often impressed with the creative solutions offices have implemented to make this vaccine work for them. Only your office knows what is best, but below are solutions other locations have found helpful.

- Use the additional [AAPVT grant money](#) to pay for extra staff time. Staff time added for COVID-19 vaccination purposes can be during normal operations, after hours or on weekends.
- Set aside nurse-only visits for COVID-19 vaccine administration throughout your typical clinic day.
- Fear of vaccine waste should not be a barrier to offering COVID-19 vaccination in your office. See the [Minimizing Vaccine Waste Policy](#) for more information. However, to reduce vaccine waste, some offices offer COVID-19 vaccine appointments during the first hour or two of a clinic day leaving a few doses in the vaccine vial to administer on an as-needed basis throughout the rest of the clinic day.
- Offer COVID-19 vaccination appointments during evening or weekend sick visit call times.
- If running large, formalized clinics is not feasible for your office, consider offering an hour or two once a week. Many offices have had a lot of success with consistent, small increases in availability.
- If your office allows, offer drive-up clinics. Vaccinate in the car and have parents wait in the parking lot for 15 minutes. See the [Tips for Drive-thru Clinics](#) document for more information.

The 15- to 30-minute wait time post-vaccination is a unique challenge to clinic flow. The patient must stay on the premise and be able to notify practice staff in the event of a reaction, but clinical staff does not need to observe them the entire time. Below are some solutions other practices have found to address this barrier.

- Reserve a corner of the waiting room for 15-minute wait times.
- Assess COVID-19 vaccination status before the office visit and administer the vaccine immediately so the 15-minute wait time and office visit happen at the same time.
- Ask patients to wait in the car and honk the horn if there is an issue. You may also administer vaccines in the patients' cars.
- Patients may get texted when an exam room is ready for them. This leaves the waiting room area dedicated for COVID-19 observation.
- Set an exam room aside once a week for vaccine administration and observation.

