**Catch-up to Get Ahead Communications Materials:**

**Key Messages and Talking Points for Parents and Providers**

**August 2021**

**Key Messages**

* COVID-19 disrupted life-saving vaccination at a global level, putting millions at risk for catching diseases like measles, meningitis, and whooping cough.
* Vaccines save lives. Vaccines are safe and effective at preventing potentially life-threatening diseases in children and adults.
* Vaccine-preventable diseases are still a threat.
* Without high immunization levels, communities are at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks.
* August is National Immunization Awareness Month! This is the time to get back on track with routine vaccines.
* This August, HHS is working with diverse partners to drive the importance of catch-up and on-time immunization to prevent diseases, especially for those living in medically underserved areas.

**Parents/Decision Makers**

**Immunization can save a loved one’s life.**

* Because of advances in medical science, you and your loved ones can be protected against more diseases than ever before. Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of people, have been eliminated primarily due to vaccines.
* Vaccination is a highly effective, safe, and easy way to help keep your child and family healthy.
* Delaying or missing vaccines leaves us vulnerable to illness during the continuation of the pandemic, when healthcare resources may be strained.
* Without vaccines, we are at risk for getting seriously ill, missing work or school, suffering a disability, or even dying from diseases like measles, meningitis, and whooping cough.

**It is important to vaccinate on time. Do not delay vaccination because of the COVID-19 pandemic. If you, your child, or other family member has fallen behind on routine immunizations, talk to a healthcare provider as soon as possible to catch-up.**

* Timely vaccination is critical for the health of your children, your family, and your community.
* Scheduling a vaccine appointment is more important than ever. Making sure your family has all recommended vaccines will keep them healthier during this challenging time.

**Vaccines help protect you from serious infectious diseases throughout your life — from infancy and into old age.**

* Make sure that you and your family are up to date on your vaccinations — they’re your best shot against serious, preventable illness.
* While scheduling back-to-school vaccines for your children, if you or anyone in your family has fallen behind on receiving routine vaccinations, the entire family should catch-up on vaccines, which prevents risks associated with vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks and helps keep communities safe.
* Likewise, when any member of the family gets a COVID-19 vaccine or other vaccine, please check with your provider to make sure everyone is caught up on their recommended vaccines.

**Vaccines are safe and effective at preventing serious diseases.**

* Vaccines work with your natural defenses to help develop protection from diseases.
* Vaccines are given only after careful and detailed reviews by scientists, doctors, and other healthcare professionals. Vaccines are continuously monitored for safety and effectiveness after they are recommended for use.
* Like all medical products, vaccines may sometimes have side effects. The most common side effects are mild pain, swelling, or redness at the site of injection and they generally go away quickly. Serious side effects such as severe allergic reactions are extremely rare.
* The disease-prevention benefits of vaccines overwhelmingly outweigh possible side effects for almost everyone, but if you have concerns about this, talk with a medical provider.

**Get vaccinated even if you do not have health insurance and cannot pay.**

* Many families are facing financial difficulties during the pandemic. If you lost your health insurance, or your plan’s copays or other out-of-pocket costs are too much, your child can still get vaccinated.
* If you need help, free vaccines may be available through a program called Vaccines for Children. Ask your child’s healthcare provider about it.
* Additionally, most health insurance plans are required to cover recommended vaccines without charging a copay or coinsurance when the vaccine is given by a doctor in your network. Check with your insurance plan to find out if there’s any cost to you. Find health care coverage options at HealthCare.gov.
* Free vaccines are often available through the Vaccines for Children program at your state or local health department immunization clinics, federally qualified health centers, and many private healthcare provider offices and pharmacies.

**Vaccine-preventable diseases are still a threat. Vaccination is the best protection from them.**

* Some vaccine-preventable diseases, like chickenpox, flu, and whooping cough, remain common in the United States.
* When vaccination rates fall even just a little, vaccine-preventable diseases can spread easily.
* Protect your child from these and other potentially serious diseases that are preventable with vaccines. Get yourself and your family caught up and stay caught up on vaccines.

**It is important to work with your healthcare provider to keep up to date on vaccines.**

* This August, talk to your healthcare provider about your family’s need to catch-up on any routine vaccines.
* During the National Immunization Awareness Month, your state or local health department immunization clinic, health center, healthcare provider office, and pharmacy may provide vaccination services during extended hours or additional locations to help your family get caught up on vaccines.

**Provider Messages**

**Now is the time to get patients caught up on their vaccinations so they are ahead for the future.**

* Many children and adults have fallen behind on recommended vaccines due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
* With the flu season beginning in just a few weeks and the unfortunate prospect that the flu and COVID-19 viruses may circulate at the same time, now is the time to ensure that all children are caught up on their vaccines.
* Getting patients up to date on vaccines now will prevent illnesses that lead to unnecessary medical visits, hospitalizations, and additional strain on the healthcare system.

**Protecting communities from vaccine-preventable diseases is one of the most important things you can do to keep us all healthy and prevent outbreaks. A strong recommendation from a trusted healthcare provider is the best predictor of vaccination.**

* It is now more important than ever to assess vaccination status of all of your patients, and potentially their family members, at every medical visit, whether the visit is in-person or remote (telephone, online, etc.).
* Healthcare providers have the knowledge, experience, and authority to make a strong case for vaccination, as well as the trust of their patients.
* When recommending vaccination, assume that most people will choose to vaccinate. This presumptive approach to recommending vaccination has been proven to be effective. For more information on how to make a strong vaccination recommendation and best practices, visit [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and search for #HowIRecommend vaccines.

**We need your help with communicating the importance of immunization and bringing your patients up to date on their vaccinations.**

* During National Immunization Awareness Month, we are asking for your help in promoting vaccination and getting every patient up to date on recommended vaccines.
* You can champion vaccination in your practice by ensuring all staff be up to date on their vaccinations and sharing frequent and consistent messages about the importance of immunization.
* Assess vaccination status at every visit, whether in-person or remotely (telephone, online, etc.). Promptly schedule in-person appointments for catch-up vaccinations.
* Use the clout you have with your patients to get them caught up on vaccines. You can implement the following tactics to encourage follow through on vaccination:
  + Extend your service hours (evenings and weekends) during the month of August for vaccination services or to accommodate more appointments with vaccinations.
  + Use your patient reminder-recall system and notifications to reach patients and parents with children who have fallen behind on their vaccinations.
  + Provide referrals to another place where vaccines are available, such as pharmacies or state or local health department immunization clinics.
  + Partner with the health department or community groups to host a vaccination clinic or event. This strategy could be repeated for flu vaccines during flu season in October. CDC provides guidance on planning satellite vaccination clinics.