



The Maryland State Medical Society

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ONE THING PARENTS CAN CONTROL THIS SCHOOL YEAR: GETTING THEIR KIDS VACCINATED

Op-Ed in The Baltimore Sun by Gene Ransom, MedChi CEO

BALTIMORE, August 24, 2020 - Vaccination requirements are a health and safety rule parents should follow even as schools switch to remote learning because of the pandemic.

For Maryland students and families, back-to-school planning looks different this year, as many school districts welcome students back remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one back-to-school tradition that families should continue is making sure that children get their recommended vaccines.

Children must have updated immunization records at the start of the school year even for remote learning. Maintaining the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) recommended vaccine schedule is critical for helping Maryland communities avoid outbreaks of vaccine-preventable illnesses amid the pandemic.

While much of our collective focus has justifiably been on slowing the spread of COVID-19, there is growing concern among Maryland physicians and public health officials regarding outbreaks of other dangerous infectious diseases, such as measles and meningitis. Children have missed scheduled vaccine visits due to the ongoing pandemic, and as a result, the CDC has reported falling vaccination rates across the country. In March and April, [15,950 fewer children](#) in Maryland received vaccines for measles, mumps and rubella in comparison to last year.

While Maryland schools are opting for online learning for the next few months, many do have plans to return to regular in-person learning, opening a possibility for an outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases. Every parent is familiar with the "back-to-school plague" of the common cold and flu that is spread around when kids return to classrooms. Without proper immunizations, we might also see outbreaks of vaccine-preventable illnesses as face-to-face instruction slowly begins to be implemented. Health care resources are already being stretched to their limits by the coronavirus, and an outbreak of another disease like whooping cough or mumps could further stress Maryland's health care system more than it already has been.

But it's not just our younger kids who should be vaccinated at the start of the school year. Parents of teens and young adults should discuss with their health care providers how to protect college-aged students from diseases like meningitis as they prepare to return to campus either this fall or in the winter. Bacterial and viral meningitis spread quickly in tight quarters, like college dorms, and bacterial meningitis can be deadly. Thankfully, the meningococcal conjugate and meningitis B vaccines can help prevent the spread of the disease in the first place.

Ahead of school starting, parents can view their children's official vaccination records at md.myir.net, a free online portal from the Maryland Department of Health. Parents can confirm the status of their children's most recent vaccinations and work with their family physician or health care provider to ensure their kids stay on the recommended schedule.

Family physicians and other health practitioners in Maryland are taking the necessary precautions to ensure that in-person visits are as safe as possible for the entire family. Offices are disinfecting examination rooms between visits; staggering appointments and asking patients to wait in their car until a room is available in order to enforce social distancing; rescheduling in-person office visits to telemedicine appointments; offering online check-ins and requiring all staff and patients to wear masks. These precautions should provide peace of mind to parents and provide various safe options for in-person physician visits.

While there is much anxiety and uncertainty surrounding back-to-school season this year, one thing that parents can control is ensuring that their children are up to date on the most recent recommended vaccine schedule before school starts. We encourage all families to have a conversation with their physician about the most appropriate vaccinations for your children as summer comes to an end. As we continue our fight against COVID-19, we can't let our guard down against the threat of other serious vaccine-preventable illnesses.

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About MedChi

MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. It is the largest physician organization in Maryland. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland's foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit www.medchi.org.