

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Manisha Juthani, MD  
Commissioner



Ned Lamont  
Governor  
Susan Bysiewicz  
Lt. Governor

Dear Connecticut COVID-19 Vaccine Providers,

In November, the Department of Public Health (DPH) reached out to Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to learn from these providers about successes, challenges, and needs in the roll-out of the pediatric Pfizer vaccine for children ages 5–11. Now, we want to share back lessons and practices that we think will be useful to each of you as COVID-19 vaccine providers. The ideas below are a testament to Connecticut COVID-19 vaccine providers' hard work and dedication. We hope you find at least one new idea that can help ensure an equitable roll-out of the vaccine for children across the state.

### Here are best practices for vaccine equity in the 5–11 roll-out that we heard from FQHCs:

- 1. Open pediatric (age 5–11) clinics to the whole family.** Many FQHCs have opened their pediatric clinics to adults and are seeing successes, including parents bringing in children age 5–11 as well as their siblings to get vaccinated, and parents choosing to get a booster when their children get vaccinated. Providers have developed safe, effective approaches for managing multiple vaccine products in a single setting, including color-coding all ancillary supplies based on vaccine type – for instance, marking vaccine trays, timers, and other vaccine supplies orange for pediatric vaccine, blue for Pfizer (12+), and red for Moderna.
- 2. Provide ongoing vaccine access via school-based health centers.** As we have seen from the start of the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, effective vaccine distribution happens in the spaces where people live, work, learn, play, pray, and gather (see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) '[Ways to Help Increase COVID-19 Vaccinations](#)'). Specifically, many school-based health centers are partnering with DPH on one-time pop-up clinics for children aged 5–11, but we know that the roll-out will take time. Reach out to your partner schools to understand whether you can provide ongoing support for vaccination. Review the updated [#Vax2SchoolCT Toolkit](#) for specific guidance on hosting school-based clinics, communicating with parents, and more.
- 3. Extend clinic hours after school and on select weekends.** Though we know that extending hours into evenings or weekends places additional demands on your staff, we heard FQHCs speak to the success of evening and weekend clinics wherever possible. These clinics ensure that parents can bring their children to get vaccinated after work and in a way that creates the least strain on families.
- 4. Offer the COVID-19 vaccine at every patient check-in.** Many of you have already trained your pediatricians to offer the COVID-19 vaccine at regularly-scheduled pediatric visits. Take the next step: For all adult patients (for instance, in behavioral health visits), ask if their children have been COVID-19 vaccinated and, if not, offer to



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schedule them on the spot. Have a staff member or volunteer in your clinic's waiting room to share information about the vaccine and help interested patients schedule appointments for themselves or their children, or even set up a dedicated walk-in clinic room so interested patients can get the vaccine on the spot. Use every patient interaction as an opportunity to ensure that the patient and their family can receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

- 5. Conduct proactive outreach to every patient.** To simplify your outreach, run a Reminder/Recall report to see which vaccines are due for each patient in your clinic ([instructions here](#)), or use your electronic health record (EHR) to identify patients who have already received the COVID-19 vaccine. For those patients who have not been COVID-19 vaccinated, a personal call to offer them a vaccine appointment (or point them to nearby clinics if your appointment availability is limited) can make the difference in a parent getting their child vaccinated. You can refer patients to [CT Vaccine Finder](#) to find a provider near them. If they aren't yet ready to book an appointment, offer to call back in a few weeks to check in.
- 6. Set up a simple consent form so that children can get vaccinated without a parent present.** Don't let in-person consent stand in the way of a vaccine, especially in the context of school-based clinics, which are a powerful way to increase vaccine access for families who otherwise may face significant access barriers, including transportation and working hours. FQHCs have both collected forms in advance of clinics and allowed parents to agree to have the school nurse(s) serve as proxies. Here is one example of an [online consent form](#) from Community Health Center, Inc. for school-based clinics. Other best practices include gathering consent from parents via FaceTime or a phone call at the time of vaccination. DPH does not have specific guidance or policies related to how consent should be gathered; it is the responsibility of each provider, with your leadership and counsel, to review any consent mechanism that you use.
- 7. During vaccination, offer comfort and support not only to children but also to parents.** Addressing parental anxiety can be just as important as addressing kids' concerns about getting vaccinated. Share clear, simple information with parents about likely side-effects, listen to their concerns, and remind them of the importance of their modelling how their child can be calm and brave about getting a shot (see '[How to Answer Parents' and Caregivers' Questions about COVID-19 Vaccines](#)' from the CDC). For children, small toys – like bubble blowers or stress balls – can be helpful distractions while they are waiting for their shot, or small gifts like stickers to congratulate them on getting their shot. **If you'd like to request a free supply of educational coloring books that you can hand out to kids when they're waiting to get vaccinated, see below.**
- 8. Hold town halls to share the latest vaccination information.** Many of you spoke to the continued importance of town halls or other community forums to share information with your community. Specifically, FQHCs have held town halls in partnership with schools and have used the time primarily to train trusted local messengers. For



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instance, some of these town halls provide an opportunity to train school nurses, who then in turn can answer ongoing questions from parents and children in their community. The CDC has [helpful information](#) if you are interested in hosting a town hall for the first time (see 'How to Generate Demand for COVID-19 Vaccinations Online: Reach People Through Virtual Events').

**9. Work with your local health department to advertise your clinics.** Reach out to your local health department about how you can partner to spread the word about the vaccine, including through channels that might reach hesitant residents or residents for whom English is not their primary language. For instance, one of the FQHCs we spoke with is working with their local health department to put together a video that will be broadcast in their community about the importance of getting vaccinated. To find your local health department's contact information, [click here](#).

**10. Let us know how DPH can help!** We are here to offer support, whether you want to host a town hall, get template clinic planning or outreach materials, connect with other providers in the area, discuss best practices on how to boost uptake in your clinics, or hear the latest clinical information. We encourage you to join our biweekly provider calls (information below) or reach out directly if you have questions to [Deepa.Mavani@ct.gov](mailto:Deepa.Mavani@ct.gov).

Want to learn more? Let us know, and we can share more or connect you with the FQHCs that are implementing the above practices today.

Thank you!  
DPH Vaccination Team

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**Request free 'We Can Stay Healthy With Immunizations!' coloring books for your pediatric (ages 5–11) vaccination clinics:** Click the [link here](#) to pre-order by Monday, 12/6.

**CoVP Update:** Provides CoVP Vaccinating Providers updates on the CoVP Program and Q&A with DPH staff. **Every other Wednesday 9:00am-10:00am;** Join: [CoVP Office Hours](#). **Next meeting is December 15<sup>th</sup>** (the following meeting on December 29<sup>th</sup> will be cancelled. Meetings will resume on **January 5<sup>th</sup>**).



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