

Immunization Program Provider Spotlight 2025 Connecticut Immunization Champion October 2025

Dr. Claire Free



Not all heroes wear capes - some wear white coats and vaccinate a generation. One such hero is Dr. Claire Free, who was named the Association of Immunization Managers' (AIM) 2025 Immunization Champion for Connecticut, a well-earned honor for a provider whose name is synonymous with dedication, compassion, and vaccine advocacy in her Brookfield, Connecticut community.

Whether it's a routine childhood immunization or a deeper conversation addressing vaccine hesitancy, Dr. Free approaches every conversation with empathy and science. And her dedication does not stop at the exam room. As a member of the Danbury-area Immunization Action Plan (IAP) advisory group, she has been a collaborative voice in community efforts to expand access and equity in vaccination, ensuring all children, regardless of background, can be protected from preventable diseases.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when new requirements called for real-time electronic reporting of vaccines to CT WiZ, Dr. Free continued to demonstrate her commitment to her patients. Like many providers who had practiced for many years, Dr. Free initially kept paper medical records and had not yet embraced utilizing CT WiZ on a regular basis. But instead of resisting change, she led it. Together with her dedicated nurse, Liz, and their small team, Dr. Free learned to navigate CT WiZ, mastering data entry, vaccine ordering, and inventory management. Not only that, the team undertook the task of entering all 1,200 of their patients' historical immunization records, ensuring those families would have accurate, accessible immunization records long after Dr. Free retires.



Dr. Free's innovation did not stop there. Partnering with IAP staff through the CDC's Immunization Quality Improvement for Providers (IQIP) program, she made a major push to increase HPV vaccination rates in her adolescent patients. She started recommending the vaccine at age 9, trained her staff to deliver a unified message to families, and added HPV educational materials to her waiting room. In just two years, the rate of adolescents receiving one dose of the HPV vaccine by age 13 rose by over 60 percentage points and up-to-date by age 13 rates climbed over 20 percentage points at her practice, an extraordinary achievement.

When asked what made her an advocate for immunization, Dr. Free shared a powerful memory. As a young resident, she treated a child suffering from a severe form of varicella (chickenpox) pneumonia.

Despite every effort, the child passed away, an outcome Dr. Free expressed could have been prevented with a routine vaccine. That moment never left her and drove her continued vaccine advocacy.

Immunization Program Provider Spotlight 2025 Connecticut Immunization Champion October 2025

That dedication and advocacy is clear in her interactions with families. Parents describe her as thoughtful, intuitive, and grounded. As one mother wrote, “She really knows your child and she is the old school kind of doctor that I wish we found more often.”

Dr. Free is the provider who goes the extra mile, learns the new system, has hard conversations, and always puts her patients first. She is a difference-maker and true champion for immunizations.

We thank Dr. Free for her commitment to Connecticut and wish her a happy retirement!

