

Vaccines for Children Methods of Operation

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program presents a unique opportunity for vaccine delivery in the District of Columbia. The D.C. Division of Immunization¹ currently provides vaccine to 12 Neighborhood Health Centers (NHC) and 34 other public and private facilities that serve children who would otherwise be unable to afford the cost of vaccine. Through VFC, distribution will be expanded to include additional private providers who care for medically underserved children.

Vaccine Availability

All public sector vaccines currently provided by the Division of Immunization are purchased with Federal funds through the regular 317 childhood immunization grant to the District. No District funds are available for the purchase of childhood vaccines and the District has no plans to become a universal vaccine provider at this time. The vaccines which will be made available through VFC will be used to immunize those children who meet the eligibility requirements of the program; that is, children eligible for Medicaid, children without insurance, American Indians and Alaskan natives, and underinsured children who receive vaccine at Federally Qualified Health Centers or Rural/Migrant Health Centers. There is only one Federally Qualified Health Center in the District of Columbia which operates at two sites in the city; therefore, the Division of Immunization will continue to provide 317 vaccines to other clinics for the underinsured patients they serve to the extent that funding allows.

D.C. Medicaid Program

The Medicaid program in Washington, D.C. will assist the Division of Immunization with informing providers of VFC implementation and the benefits of participation. Division staff have met with the Commissioner, D.C. Commission of Health Care Finance (CHCF), to determine the most effective means by which to inform providers of VFC implementation and the effect it will have on their practices. Medicaid providers will have the option of enrolling in VFC through the Division of Immunization or continuing to bill Medicaid for the cost of vaccines they purchase and administer to Medicaid patients. However, the D.C. Medicaid program will only reimburse up to the federal contract price for vaccines, a policy that should encourage providers to accept the free VFC vaccine. D.C. Medicaid does not reimburse providers for a vaccine administration fee and does not plan to do so. Only fees for preventive office visits are reimbursed as a

¹ The Division of Immunization is housed in the Bureau of Epidemiology and Disease Control, Preventive Health Services Administration, D.C. Commission of Public Health.

TN No. 02-06
Supersedes
TN No. NEW

Approval Date

NOV 27 2002

Effective Date

JAN 01 2002

comprehensive charge which includes vaccine administration. The administration fee cap also applies to District providers who administer vaccines to non-Medicaid VFC eligible children.

Beginning in October, the D.C. Medicaid program will begin a managed care system wherein patients must choose a primary health care provider who will oversee all aspects of the patient's medical care, including prevention visits and referrals to specialists and emergency care facilities. Because of this innovative approach to health care delivery, more providers are expected to accept Medicaid patients in their practices. The CHCF Commissioner is considering making VFC participation a requirement of all Medicaid managed care providers.

Collaboration with Other Agencies

There is strong commitment from both public and private agencies in the District of Columbia to ensure that vaccines are available for children to be immunized appropriately and on time. The Immunization Action Committee (sometimes called the Washington Area Immunization Coalition) evolved from the development of the Immunization Action Plan and current members include representatives from the Medical Society of D.C., the Medico-Chirurgical Society of D.C. (Med-Chi), the American Academy of Pediatrics - D.C. Chapter, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and health care facilities serving children at risk of under-immunization. The representatives will assist the Division of Immunization in targeting providers for VFC enrollment and advising on recruiting techniques that will be most effective in reaching these providers. Division staff recently presented VFC information at the monthly Med-Chi meeting and have arranged to meet with the Pediatric Council of the Medical Society.

Community groups involved with immunization issues in D.C. include, but are not limited to, the Children's Defense Fund - D.C. Office, Anacostia-Congress Heights Partnership, National Congress of Black Churches, HOPE Worldwide, Health Care for the Homeless, and many others. These groups will assist the Division with VFC implementation by creating parental awareness and demand for free vaccine for their eligible children.

Proposal for a Combination Distribution System

Because the Vaccines for Children program will affect so many providers in the District of Columbia, and because of limited logistical resources at the Division of Immunization (i.e., lack of space, no loading dock, no mail room) the District will use the "combination" distribution system for the delivery of vaccines. Both public and private vaccine providers will order vaccine through the Division of Immunization. All private vaccine providers, excluding those clinics currently served by the Division of Immunization, will receive vaccine directly from the National Vaccine Warehouse. The Division of Immunization will continue to deliver vaccines to the NHCs.

Under the present system, the Division only delivers vaccine to the NHCs and couriers from the other vaccine accounts come to the Division to pick up vaccine orders. The pick up

arrangement often interrupts the day-to-day operations of the Division since the couriers come to the Division office whenever their facility is in need of vaccine. sometimes twice per month, and the vaccine order has to be filled immediately while the courier waits. The Division does not have a permanent vaccine supply employee available at all times.