

Flu Vaccine Innovation during COVID-19

Illinois Chapter

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Because flu vaccine uptake is now more critical than ever, ICAAP surveyed its membership in September 2020 to learn what innovative ways providers are working to reach their patient populations to provide flu immunization during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are highlights from the four providers who shared their stories.

Drive-Through Clinics

Description

When ABC Pediatrics, located in Bourbonnais and Clifton, received their flu vaccine this year, they moved to a drive/walk through method for administering the vaccine. Stickers are used outside to mark appropriate spacing (6 feet apart) for families waiting in line and patients must have their temperatures checked. At this time, they are also asked their preference for injectable vs mist. Once the patient comes inside, the nurse administers the vaccine, and the patient then exits via an exit-only door. This summer, PediaTrust, located throughout the north, northwest, and western suburban areas of Chicago, began planning for drive-through flu vaccine clinics as well to accommodate large numbers of patients safely, efficiently, and conveniently for families and staff.

Results

ABC Pediatrics published their plan to open Saturday Flu clinics to their Facebook page and within minutes, patients were calling to schedule. PediaTrust received a tremendous amount of positive feedback and expressions of gratitude for the safety of the process from their patients and families. During their first two-hour clinic, they vaccinated almost 200 patients in the 2-hour window. After a few weeks of drive-through clinics, PediaTrust had given 2,675 outdoor flu vaccines (of 5,500 total doses given).

Top Recommendations for Other Providers

Jenna Koch from ABC Pediatrics said to be persistent and use social media. She also said that you will likely get a greater response when offering prizes or giveaways. Dr. Sirota from PediaTrust said not to be afraid to make a change for the better - the process is surprisingly simple, and you don't have to reinvent the wheel. She also said that her practice would be happy (as are others) to share their plans with you!

Practice Contact Information

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Creative Online Videos and Scheduling

Description

Northwestern Children's Practice has developed creative videos for the past six years to remind patients to get flu shots. Some have even received local and national media attention. Several of the videos can be seen here: <https://bit.ly/3oh1FBP>. In previous years, Northwestern Children's Practice had walk-in flu shot clinics 7 days a week at noon from September until they ran out. This year, to avoid crowds, they implemented an easy online scheduling option on their website that lets patients book their flu shot without needing to call the office.

Results

Northwestern Children's Practice has had many patients tell them that they enjoy their videos and that they look forward to the next one. While they do not currently have a way to tell if the videos boost vaccination rates, it is a fun way to engage with patients and remind them to get their flu shot. In terms of the online booking system, they are able to control the number of open slots so that they have more flu shot availability when the other office visits are slower, and less flu shot availability when it is busier.

Top Recommendations for Other Providers

Dr. Goldstein said that as far as the videos go, just be creative! He also recommended that providers do as much as they can to make it as easy as possible for patients to get flu shots, like the online scheduling option.

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Practice Policy Requiring Vaccination

Description

At MP Pediatrics, the office has instituted a policy that all vaccines are mandatory to stay a part of the practice unless there are clear medical contraindications. Parents, however, have the right to refuse vaccines. The providers at MP Pediatrics are passionate about vaccination and are willing to spend as much time as needed to explain to parents why they are so important. The goal with their policy is that the patient gets vaccinated, not dismissed from the practice. Parents have told Dr. Perez that in other practices the attitude was more along the lines of "you don't want them, ok sign this and you can't come back." Dr. Perez feels that because their policy includes all vaccines, including flu and HPV, it sends a strong message, and their patients get these vaccines that otherwise might not. She also said that she feels it makes more sense, from a legal perspective, to include all vaccines in the policy; that way there is no picking and choosing.

Results

MP Pediatrics has not formally assessed how their change in vaccine policy made a difference in rates, but anecdotally, they feel it has helped a lot. Dr. Perez said that it

was challenging for the first few years, but now, come August, patients call daily asking if they have the flu vaccine in. They have certainly lost a handful of patients, but they have vaccinated many, many more because of it. Those parents and extended families have also said that they are more inclined to get vaccinated as well.

Top Recommendations for Other Providers

If a practice already has a policy stating that they do not do a broken-down immunizations schedule or skip certain vaccines (like MMR), make it universal. It is a challenge at first but becomes wonderful over time.

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