



The importance of continuing to provide routine immunizations during a global pandemic

MAY 10, 2020 - In alignment with the Immunize Canada position paper, the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) believes that it is important to continue providing and encouraging patients to receive their routine immunizations during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Immunize Canada's statement released on April 27, 2020 outlined the importance of continuing to provide routine immunizations as per public health guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic¹. Following this, other organizations such as the Canadian Pediatric Society released similar statements of support². During the pandemic, physicians have transitioned to virtual consultations allowing patients to cancel or postpone their clinic visits; this has resulted in a 50% drop in the administration of measles, mumps, and rubella shots, and 42% dip in diphtheria and whooping cough shots in the United States³. This has led to increased concern that vaccine-preventable diseases, including measles, pertussis, and meningitis, may re-emerge, particularly when physical distancing and travel laws are eased¹.

Importance of Immunizations

Immunization services are a crucial component of our healthcare system that help reduce morbidity and mortality associated with vaccine-preventable diseases, particularly in vulnerable populations (i.e. infants, pregnant women, older adults, immuno-compromised individuals or individuals with comorbidities)¹. The effectiveness of vaccines has been studied and proven. We have seen decreases in the number of cases of whooping cough, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, and polio in Canada after the introduction of vaccines for each of these diseases at rates of 87%, 99%, 99%, 99%, 99%, and 100%, respectively⁴.

With the disruption of routine immunizations, vaccine-preventable diseases may become widespread once social-distancing measures are relieved and international travel is resumed¹. This would not only increase morbidity and mortality of these vaccine-preventable diseases but also subsequently lead to an increased burden on our already strained healthcare system⁵.

Barriers to Provide Vaccines during COVID

The cancellation and postponement of clinic visits and appointments have undermined routine childhood immunization coverage. The public seems to be unaware of the importance of continuing their vaccinations despite the current physical distancing recommendations. Further, ensuring that clinics have appropriate measures to minimize contact between patients poses another barrier to patients receiving their routine vaccinations during this pandemic.



How to Provide Vaccines During COVID

As mentioned above, it is important that routine immunizations be continued and the interruption or delay of these services be minimized⁶. The Canadian Pediatric Society has made the following recommendations²:

1. Enhance infection control protocols in clinics, including pre-screening by telephone
2. Reserve certain times of the day for immunizations
3. Eliminate the waiting room when possible
4. Schedule follow-ups by phone
5. Schedule 'catch-up' immunizations for children who have missed a vaccine due to illness or school closure

Creative ways to vaccinate children in the community⁷:

6. Drive-up vaccination clinic with no shared waiting space or close-up conversations with staff

Additional Resources

1. The Dalla Lana School of Public Health held an excellent webinar covering this topic. It can be found at the following website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keixvjwWHcg>

References

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