



Vaccination for Children and Adolescents: Considerations for Family Shelters and Housing Programs

Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends that all children aged 5 years and older get a COVID-19 vaccine to help protect against COVID-19](#). Shelters and housing programs for families with children should maximize access to vaccines currently approved by CDC for all family members. Planning efforts to vaccinate children should consider the following guiding principles:

- **Address Concerns**—Parents and guardians want the best for their children. Even if an adult is vaccinated against COVID-19, they may hesitate to vaccinate children in their care. Parents and guardians should be connected to pediatricians or primary care providers to answer questions. [Other community members such as vaccine ambassadors](#), faith partners, and elders may also be trusted sources of information. Community partners providing guidance should be educated on the [benefits of COVID-19 vaccines for children](#) prior to engaging parents and guardians. Additionally, [this guidance](#) may help answer common questions about the vaccine.
- **Be Familiar with the Various Ways to Access Vaccines in Your Community**—Child vaccines are offered through different providers in different locations across the U.S. Your community may rely on individual practitioners or pediatric groups, while others may access pharmacies or school systems that engage in vaccination efforts. Leverage the existing infrastructure for vaccinations and consider the easiest option for families with children. Homeless shelters and housing programs should actively support parents and guardians to connect with the most accessible vaccination option for their children.
- **Use Healthcare Partners**—Coordinate with your public health or [Healthcare for the Homeless partner](#) to come onsite for vaccine events.
- **Offer Other Recommended Vaccines**—The U.S. has a [recommended vaccination schedule](#) for children and youth aged 18 years and younger. When working with a healthcare partner to host a COVID-19 vaccine event, ask about providing access to the flu vaccine or other recommended vaccines. Discuss whether the healthcare provider could also bring adult doses of the vaccine so parents can get vaccinated alongside their children.
- **Host a Health Fair**—Including other medical services such as eye and hearing exams and primary care check-ups provides additional benefits, often without significant additional planning. When planning for such an event, talk with parents and guardians about what additional health services they would like for their children.

Planning Considerations	Family Shelter, Housing Program, or Unsheltered Location
Talk with your shelters and housing programs that serve families with children to quantify the number of children eligible for vaccination who are located in sheltered settings. Engage outreach workers and street medicine practitioners to estimate the number of unsheltered families with children. When you are planning with public health, use these data to determine the correct number of vaccine doses for events.	✓
Many children aged 5–11 years attend school during the day, so offer vaccine events in the evening or on weekends to minimize a disruption in household schedules.	✓
Identify regular family gathering places such as libraries, food banks, sporting events, faith centers, schools, and aftercare programs and consider these as possible vaccination and education event locations.	✓
Talk with parents and guardians about whether they are interested in having their children vaccinated for COVID-19 and where they would be most comfortable getting their children vaccinated. This could be where they are staying or at their pediatrician’s office or a local pharmacy. Offer transportation if needed.	✓

Communication	Family Shelter, Housing Program, or Unsheltered Location
When talking with parents and guardians about the COVID-19 vaccine for their children, ask about their concerns and questions. Provide easy-to-understand answers in the parent or guardian’s primary language and ensure parents and guardians have ongoing access to trusted sources of information . Do not use bilingual minors as translators.	✓
Share information about side effects and encourage parents/guardians to reach out if they are concerned about their children post-vaccine.	✓
Remind parents and guardians that even when children are vaccinated, everyone should continue to wear masks in indoor congregate settings, engage in handwashing and good hygiene practices, and socially distance whenever possible.	✓
Logistics	
If shelters and housing programs plan to offer vaccination events onsite, consider setting up the vaccination room with items that will put children at ease. Posters, a prize box (for post-vaccine treats), “I got the COVID-19 vaccine” stickers, and pro-vaccine messages can make the room more inviting.	✓
If parents and guardians plan to take their children offsite for their vaccine, provide flexibility in the program scheduling to support these efforts.	✓
Children may have side effects, so ensure there is space for children and their parents/guardians to rest and recuperate and have over-the-counter medications and comforting items like ice packs and popsicles on hand to help alleviate side effects.	✓
Children who do not feel well typically want their parent(s) or guardian(s) close by, so consider suspending any shelter protocol that forces residents out during the day. For parents/guardians that work, provide them with the support they need to stay home and care for their children.	✓
Staff Support	
There may be situations where parents/guardians are unable to stay home while their children recuperate. Consider team members who are willing to care for the children during the day or evening while the parent/guardian is at work/school/other commitments.	✓
If shelters and housing programs plan to offer vaccination events onsite, be sure all staff interacting with children are trauma-informed . Vaccinations can heighten anxieties in children. Always be honest about shots but recognize that telling kids ahead of time may lead to unnecessary stress.	✓
Individuals accompanying children for their vaccinations can model anxiety management behavior. Encourage deep breathing (in through the nose, out through the mouth) and brainstorm other ways that the children can help themselves feel better when they are anxious or stressed. Additionally, offering to hold a child’s hand during the vaccination event and using encouraging words may help reduce anxiety.	✓