



STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM
CORDELL HULL BUILDING, 1ST FLOOR
425 - 5TH AVENUE NORTH
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243

Date: September 7, 2011

To: Tennessee Healthcare Providers

From: Kelly L. Moore, MD, MPH, *Medical Director, Immunization Program (TIP)*

Re: New limitations on some federally funded vaccines given at health departments

Dear Healthcare Provider,

This letter is to share information about new limits to the availability of federally funded vaccines that our local health departments provide to patients at no charge. Most vaccines given in health departments are to children who qualify for the federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) entitlement program: such children are completely unaffected.

Tennessee receives well over \$70 million for VFC-eligible children, but its federal budget for non-VFC eligible children and adults, which was subsidized with federal stimulus money in 2009 and 2010, is no longer subsidized and the base budget has been cut from \$4.4 million to \$3.3 million, starting October 2011. These funds are used to provide vaccine in public health clinics to adults and to children ineligible for the VFC Program. Because there are not state funds to fill this gap, health department clinics are implementing new policies for vaccines provided to children ineligible for VFC and all adults. This letter summarizes these changes: please review it carefully.

Important definitions (for purposes of this letter):

- **Uninsured** = a person has no health insurance coverage at all. Adults with TennCare or CoverTN are not eligible for vaccines restricted to uninsured adults only.
- **Underinsured** (applies to children under 19 years) = a child with private insurance that does not cover recommended vaccines as a benefit. Such children currently qualify for Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program entitlement vaccine in health departments or federally-qualified health centers. If the insurance covers some vaccines, but excludes others, the child is VFC-eligible only for the excluded vaccine.
- **Fully insured** (applies to children, *not* VFC eligible) = a child with state CoverKids insurance or private insurance that includes vaccine as a covered benefit, even if there are co-pays or deductibles. Fully insured children are ineligible for the VFC Program.

Federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program for eligible children 0 through 18 years: no changes

The VFC entitlement program covers most of the children vaccinated in health departments. It is **not affected** by these budget cuts. Health departments will continue to provide ALL recommended vaccines to children younger than 19 years who meet any one of the following eligibility criteria:

- Uninsured
- TennCare (even if they also have coverage by another insurance)
- American Indian or Alaskan Native (“Native American”) ethnicity
- “Underinsured” [*VFC in Health Departments and Federally Qualified Health Centers only*]

Changes for children ineligible for VFC (fully insured): ages 7-18 years only

- Vaccines remain available to any child exposed to a vaccine-preventable disease where vaccine is recommended by public health to prevent the spread of illness.
- Birth through 6 years: No change. They will continue to be given the vaccines they need if they come to a health department.
- Age 7 through 18 years may be provided only vaccines needed to meet school entry requirements.
 - These children will be referred to a provider who can bill insurance for any vaccine the child does not need to meet school entry requirements. This includes meningococcal vaccine, HPV vaccine, hepatitis A vaccine, and (beginning fall 2012) influenza vaccine.

Adults (19 years and up): Changes for all ages

- Federally-funded vaccines remain available to any person exposed to a vaccine-preventable disease where vaccine is recommended by public health to prevent the spread of illness, regardless of insurance status. For example, the at-risk contacts of a person with hepatitis B infection or measles.
- Federally-funded vaccines remain available to **uninsured** adults who need them to meet state college entry requirements. These include MMR vaccine or varicella vaccine. Those with insurance may be offered state or locally-purchased vaccine and will be charged for vaccine and administration.
- One dose of federally-funded Hib vaccine may be provided to an asplenic or post-stem cell transplant adult referred by a physician (when the patient is unable to obtain it elsewhere).
- Tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis (Tdap) vaccine will be limited to **uninsured** adults who are close contacts (household, caregiver) of a pregnant woman or an infant under 1 year of age.

Note: Adults with TennCare, CoverTN or private insurance that does not cover vaccine are not uninsured.

Local health departments may offer vaccines other than those purchased with federal funds. Most charge recipients for both the vaccine and the administration fee (or bill TennCare). Contact the local health department for details.

Key points:

Health departments will encourage patients with insurance coverage for vaccines to be immunized by a provider who is equipped to bill insurance for those services. Providers who have routinely referred such patients to local health departments should make other arrangements to ensure that these patients can be vaccinated. Options include providing the vaccines or developing a referral relationship with another immunizing provider, whether a clinic or immunizing pharmacist. In addition, vaccine manufacturers offer patient assistance programs through private sector providers to provide vaccine at no cost to adults in need; if you treat adults, talk with manufacturers' representatives about their patient assistance programs.

Eventually, private insurance carriers will be required to cover all recommended vaccinations without co-pay or deductible, eliminating financial barriers for most patients. In the meantime, we need your help to prevent these federal funding cuts from hurting immunization rates and increasing cases of preventable diseases.

We understand that these changes will be challenging for patients. If you offer vaccines, please let your patients know. If you routinely refer patients to a local health department, consider becoming an immunization provider or making arrangements to ensure that your patients continue to be immunized by a pharmacist or other provider. You are welcome to contact the Tennessee Immunization Program at (615) 741-7247 or visit our registry website at <http://twis.tn.gov> if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly L. Moore, MD, MPH
Medical Director, Tennessee Immunization Program