

CDC: Rate of unvaccinated toddlers increasing

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While most 2-year-olds have received at least some vaccines, the rate of unvaccinated young children has been rising, according to a new report from federal health officials.

“While we know parental choice clearly plays a role, we also see in this report that access does seem to be an issue,” said Amanda Cohn, M.D., FAAP, senior advisor for vaccines for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. “In particular, uninsured kids were highly represented in that group of kids who didn’t get vaccinated.”

The findings come from two new reports the CDC released today in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* on vaccination for [children ages 19-35 months](#) and for [kindergarten children](#).

Children under 3 years

Data from the 2017 National Immunization Survey-Child on toddlers show coverage rates were over 90% for multiple vaccines — at least three doses of poliovirus vaccine, at least one dose of measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR), at least three doses of hepatitis B vaccine and at least one dose of varicella vaccine. Vaccine coverage was lowest for hepatitis A, the seven-vaccine series, rotavirus and hepatitis B.

Roughly 1.3% had not received any vaccinations by 24 months, according to the report. That’s up from 0.3% in the 2001 survey.

Coverage rates were lowest for children who were uninsured and those in rural areas. Among unvaccinated children, about 17.2% were uninsured compared to 2.8% of all children, according to the report.

Transportation, availability of doctors and clinic hours all may be barriers to vaccination. The CDC is working to increase awareness of the Vaccines for Children program, which provides free vaccines to eligible children who are unable to pay. Dr. Cohn said pediatricians can help by referring uninsured patients to participating providers. They also should vaccinate children in rural areas on schedule at every opportunity as these children may not get into the office frequently.

She credited health care providers for the high overall rates and encouraged them to continue to educate families.

“Their strong recommendation for children in their practice to get vaccinated is incredibly influential on a parents’ choice to get vaccinated, so just reiterating the importance of vaccination and helping parents understand the benefits of vaccination and the severity of diseases they are preventing is really important,” Dr. Cohn said.

Kindergarten children

A second CDC report found high overall vaccination rates among kindergartners but also room for improvement.

For state-required doses of diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccines, median coverage was 95.1%, according to data collected by state and local vaccination programs. Similarly, median coverage was 94.3% for two doses of MMR vaccine and 93.8% for two doses of varicella vaccine. For all three vaccines, Mississippi had the highest coverage rates while Washington, D.C., had the lowest.

A median of 2.2% of kindergartners had an exemption from school vaccination requirements, increasing slightly for the third consecutive year. Dr. Cohn said the increase may be due in part to improved reporting that classifies children as having an exemption rather than being provisionally enrolled.

Exemptions ranged from 0.1% in Mississippi to 7.6% in Oregon, and most were nonmedical. A median of 1.8% of kindergarten students were provisionally enrolled or attending school during a grace period.

Resources

- [CDC immunization schedules](#)
- [AAP immunization resources](#)
- [AAP clinical report "Countering Vaccine Hesitancy"](#)
- [Frequently asked questions from parents about immunizations](#)

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