

Vaccine Recordkeeping: A Team Approach for a Healthier Tomorrow

Keeping vaccine records up to date is key to a patient's lifelong immunity and health. Official childhood vaccination records have been adopted by every state and territory to encourage uniformity, but limited interoperability in healthcare can make recordkeeping a challenge. As a result, responsibility falls on both the patients and providers for managing records throughout the patient's life. For comprehensive reporting, providers and patients have the opportunity to approach recordkeeping as a team to ensure a lifetime of protection against disease.

Establishing and maintaining vaccine records

In current practice, vaccine recordkeeping can be a disjointed process, with data changing hands frequently over the course of a patient's life. Because a person's immunization record is established after their first vaccination – usually in childhood – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [encourages parents and guardians to take responsibility](#) for maintaining the record throughout the child's life, particularly since schools often require proof of vaccination.

Once the child enters adulthood, the transfer of responsibility for their records is not always seamless. Patients use their medical history – which is largely managed by their primary care provider – to keep track of immunizations, but moving from one provider to another can leave gaps. One study found that the [average American will see at least 18 providers in their lifetime](#), which creates opportunities for vaccine information to be forgotten or lost.

Guidance from the CDC suggests that adults who are missing vaccination records [turn to records from schools or previous employers](#), but those entities are not guaranteed to keep such records on file. In some cases, repeating vaccines without a record is necessary to safeguard against disease.

The challenge of preserving vaccine records

All states participate in or run their own [immunization information systems](#) (IIS), a confidential, digital database that records immunization doses administered by providers. The majority of pediatricians (90%) use their IIS systems, according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and 90% of those participants say their registries are instrumental in improving vaccination rates.

An IIS is only as good as its data. The state siloes can make it difficult for IIS registries to share data if patients move between states, making it imperative that providers work proactively with their patients to transfer missing data to the registry. The data can, and should, go beyond immunization dates. Including deeper detail like product names, manufacturers, and lot numbers can give a more complete view of immunization history, which is particularly helpful for [series like HPV](#) that have changed vaccine specifications.

Setting patients up for success

Patients with missing records and providers with limited registries have to work together to develop and maintain the most accurate and up-to-date immunization records. Providers, as medical authorities, can lead these efforts and encourage patients to take greater ownership over their own immunization records.

1. Participate in an IIS

Enroll your practice or organization in an [immunization registry](#) and commit to sharing all patient vaccination history. Tell new patients about your participation, explain the benefits and encourage them to opt in, if required.

2. Utilize your EHR

Your Electronic Health Record (EHR) system can be a valuable resource for identifying patients who have fallen behind in vaccinations and finding gaps in their vaccination history. Research published in [Applied Clinical Informatics](#) observed a significant increase (from 65% to 76%) in children receiving the recommended series of vaccinations when their providers used an EHR to track and manage immunization programs.

3. Help patients with their own vaccine recordkeeping systems

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) recommends that patients keep an updated vaccination record in their home, and bring a [vaccine tracking card](#) to every appointment so their provider can keep it updated. During visits, providers should check with patients to see if they are actively updating their record, and offer a new record card if they have lost or misplaced it. Additionally, there are a number of [smartphone apps](#) available to help parents keep track of immunizations and overall child wellness.

By taking an active approach to taking and updating vaccine records, and engaging patients in the process, providers can help establish and maintain consistent recordkeeping for a lifetime.

For more information, please contact Cindy Berenson or Jeff Winokur at 800-741-2044 or info@atlantichhealthpartners.com.