

Catch Up to Stay Ahead: A call for urgent action to protect Tennessee children from vaccine-preventable diseases

A healthy Tennessee depends on the health and well-being of its children. Since the March 2020 declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States (U.S.), dramatic decreases in uptake of routinely recommended vaccines have occurred and placed families, schools, and communities at risk. As of May 2021, the effects of pandemic disruptions have been more severe for recommended adolescent vaccinations, including pertussis, human papillomavirus (HPV) cancer prevention, and meningitis, with declines of 18% nationally compared to previous years, representing millions of missed doses. In Tennessee, adolescent vaccinations remain down 17% overall from a previous decline as high as 64% in March 2020 due to the pandemic. The negative effects of the pandemic on vaccinations for adolescents who are publicly insured have persisted, however, with some evidence of recovery among adolescents who are privately insured.

In response to the detrimental effects of the pandemic on recommended vaccinations, [National Cancer Institute](#) (NCI)-Designated Cancer Centers and other organizations issued a [joint statement](#) in May 2021 urging the nation's healthcare systems, healthcare providers, parents and children, and young adults to get back on track. **Today, Tennessee healthcare providers, public health professionals, and community stakeholders have partnered to issue an urgent call to action to catch up to stay ahead.** Tennesseans must catch up on missed doses of recommended vaccines to stay ahead of possible outbreaks and preserve the health of families, schools, and communities across the state. To get there, it will take the concerted effort and support of Tennessee healthcare systems and providers, public health professionals, parents and caregivers, and all of us to get back on track.

Acting now is critical to support catch-up on recommended vaccinations among Tennessee adolescents. Now that a COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for adolescents as early as age 12, routinely recommended adolescent vaccinations can be administered at the same time. *Healthcare systems and providers can:* 1) identify patients who have missed doses and contact them to schedule appointments; 2) prompt healthcare providers to ask about vaccination status; and 3) use every patient visit as an opportunity for vaccination. *Parents and caregivers* can check with their healthcare provider to see if their child is due for any vaccines. *All of us* play a role in supporting catch-up on recommended vaccines that were missed. Talk to family members and friends and direct them to information.

There is no time to waste in getting caught up on recommended vaccinations and taking advantage of COVID-19 vaccination to stay ahead of vaccine-preventable diseases. The "back to school" time period is upon us and ideal for catching up on vaccinations and getting recommended ones.

More information is available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [Tennessee Department of Health](#).

This statement is endorsed by the following organizations in the state of Tennessee:

ImmunizeTN

Meharry Medical College

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center

with

American Cancer Society

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Arlington Dental

CHI Memorial Health Care System

Cumberland Pediatric Foundation

Le Bonheur Children's Hospital

Memphis Business Group on Health

Tennessee Academy of Family Physicians

Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Tennessee Dental Association

Tennessee Hospital Association

Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Association

Tennessee Men's Health Network

Tennessee Nurses Association

Tennessee Primary Care Association

Tennessee Section of the American College
of Obstetrics and Gynecology

University of Tennessee Health Science Center