Improving and Streamlining Patient Care through the Use of the Statewide Immunization Registry

Vaccines play a vital role in keeping people healthy, yet New Jersey and national immunization coverage rates are below Healthy People 2020 targets leaving many adults vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases. Some of the reasons for suboptimal rates frequently include limited patient awareness, lack of a strong vaccination recommendation from a healthcare provider, missed opportunities for vaccination, and limited coordination and continuity of care.

In 2014, the National Vaccine Advisory Committee (NVAC) revised the Standards for Adult Immunization Practice to reduce adult immunization barriers. The following Standards call on ALL healthcare professionals—whether they provide vaccinations or not—to take steps to ensure their patients are fully immunized.

1. ASSESS immunization status of all your patients at every clinical encounter.
2. Strongly RECOMMEND vaccines that patients need.
3. ADMINISTER or REFER your patients to a vaccination provider.
4. DOCUMENT vaccines received by your patients.

One of the ways pharmacies can help to meet these standards is by participating in the New Jersey Immunization Information System (NJIIS). NJIIS is the official statewide immunization registry managed by the New Jersey Department of Health, Vaccine Preventable Disease Program. It is a free, confidential, population-based online system that collects and consolidates the vaccination data of New Jersey’s residents.

The first standard is to assess the immunization status of all patients. A key component of the NJIIS is the NJIIS Scheduler Detailer. This tool provides robust immunization recommendation forecasting with a color-coded chart that lets providers know when a patient is due for a vaccine based on the date of birth and vaccination records already entered in the NJIIS. Since the NJIIS consolidates a patient’s vaccination data, pharmacies can view the vaccines recorded in NJIIS by previous providers. The vaccine forecasting tool updates automatically to reflect the latest Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations. Using this tool can help to quickly and easily identify which vaccines may be recommended for a patient, as well as future doses.

In addition to routine immunizations, some chronic health conditions may warrant additional vaccines to provide protection from diseases for which a person may be at increased risk. For example, people with diabetes are at increased risk of severe complications from pneumonia, but pneumococcal vaccination rates are suboptimal for this population. According to the 2017 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, only 40.2 percent of people with diabetes ages 18-64 years in New Jersey received the
pneumococcal vaccine. Each patient encounter serves as an opportunity to offer recommended vaccines to achieve optimal health and prevent complications from chronic health conditions.

Using the NJIIS can also assist with the prevention and control of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks. By gathering patient immunization data, pharmacies can continually assess and analyze vaccination trends and take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to reducing vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks within their communities.

Further, the NJIIS is a valuable tool that inspires and enhances interprofessional communication among providers. If a healthcare provider does not have vaccine in stock, he/she can feel comfortable referring to your pharmacy knowing that the vaccine will be properly documented in NJIIS and seen by participating providers. The consolidation of patient records can foster a collaborative relationship between the patient’s medical home and neighborhood pharmacies, leading to improved patient health and quality of care.

So how do you get started? Visit njiis.nj.gov and click on the “Enrollment and Training” tab. To register your pharmacy with NJIIS please complete the new site and new user forms available for the NJIIS New User Training. Users of NJIIS can choose to manually enter vaccine doses, or they can choose to interface with the system. To learn more about interfacing, click here. NJIIS also hosts training opportunities for users to learn more about the features of the system.

It is important to note that individuals born on or after January 1, 1998, are automatically enrolled in NJIIS. Patients born before 1998 who would like to have their immunization records included in NJIIS would need to complete an NJIIS Consent to Participate form. This form must be scanned and saved inside the patient medical record and documented in your Electronic Health record. Educational materials in both English and Spanish are available to help educate your adult patients about the benefits of participating in the registry.

In summary, immunization registries have many benefits for both the patient and immunization providers. Ensuring an accurate and up to date immunization history in a centralized location can help to prevent repeated doses, to ensure that patients have received all recommended doses, and to identify missing doses. As a community pharmacist, you play an important role in disease prevention and management. Participating in the NJIIS can further help to improve and streamline services and benefits to your patients.

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1Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) AdultVaxView
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/adultvaxview/data-reports/index.html