

HDHHS policy decision and rationale

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Good afternoon

I appreciate all of you being here. I believe that having you communicate your interests regarding the transition process will not only result in a smoother transition but also lead us to greater insights to increase provider involvement in our challenge to improve overall immunization rates.

As you can see on the handout that is in your packet, the County has over 265,000 children less than 5 years of age and almost 90,000 of them are not age appropriately vaccinated.

We believe that implementing the five strategies listed on your handout will result in significant improvement in immunization rates.

This community has made great strides in advancing one of these strategies: reducing immunization record fragmentation.

When the public sector policy makers did not appropriately step up to the plate, Texas Children's under the leadership of Dr. Feigin came to this community's rescue on the immunization front.

With investments from foundations and the State and participation from the local health departments and others, significant progress was made on the immunizations front. The local registry was developed.

I am grateful for the wisdom, insight and leadership.

Our department has made a policy decision to relinquish ownership of the local Registry and transition our data to ImmTrac.

- We believe that ImmTrac capabilities have improved substantially. ImmTrac offers a larger database. All of our records end up in ImmTrac.
- I believe that our department's participation in ImmTrac will give us greater influence in its future development. It is hard to provide feedback when you are not participating.
- Recent legislative changes have made ImmTrac more accessible to all providers.

My organization will work proactively to devise strategies to address issues that will surface during this process.

Goals of this transition are to maintain the level of providers, support for users and the number of children participating in the registry.

We wholeheartedly support those goals and will do whatever is necessary to meet those goals. I want to publicly thank the transition team which includes representatives from CDC, the state health department, Texas Children's, the Houston Area Immunization Partnership and my staff. I appreciate your work.

July 30, 2008

Strategies to Improve Coverage of Immunization Rates in Houston/Harris County

Houston/Harris County currently has over 265,245 children less than 5 years of age – almost 90,000 of them are not age-appropriately vaccinated, leaving them potentially susceptible to serious and often life-threatening vaccine-preventable diseases. The following five (5) strategies are proven and successful approaches that both private and public providers can undertake to increase immunization rates in children:

1. Reduce Immunization Record Fragmentation

- Enroll in ImmTrac, Texas's Immunization Registry (www.immtrac.tdh.state.tx.us)
- Use ImmTrac to look up records of each child before immunizing to avoid administering unnecessary shots; record all shots administered into ImmTrac

2. Immunize On Time, Every Time

- Check patients' immunization status at every visit; give all needed immunizations simultaneously; follow only true contraindications
- Follow the Minimum Interval Catch-up Immunization Schedule for children who are behind: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules
- Administer the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine universally

3. Remind and Recall All Children Needing Immunizations

- Use letters, postcards and/or phone calls to remind parents to bring children in when immunizations are due and to recall parents when shots are overdue. Both the state and local immunization registries include mechanisms to perform reminder/recall

4. Participate in the CDC National Immunization Survey (NIS)

- Fully complete the NIS questionnaires that are sent to providers to verify immunizations given to surveyed parents. The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) and Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES) can assist providers in completing the questionnaire by searching multiple sources to obtain the most completed copy of the child's immunization record
- Contact Maureen Moore, HDHHS Registry Coordinator (713-794-9267), maureen.moore@cityofhouston.net or Lois Austin, HCPHES Immunization Program Coordinator (713-439-6113, laustin@hcphe.org)

5. Ensure Vaccines are Affordable

- Enroll in the Texas Vaccines for Children Program (VFC), which provides vaccine at no cost to providers in order to immunize children who meet certain eligibility requirements (www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/tvfc)
- HCPHES and HDHHS administer VFC in Houston/Harris County