What Will It Take to Increase Maternal Vaccination Rates?

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The Alliance for Patient Access (allianceforpatientaccess.org), founded in 2006, is a national network of physicians dedicated to ensuring patient access to approved therapies and appropriate clinical care. AfPA accomplishes this mission by recruiting, training and mobilizing policy-minded physicians to be effective advocates for patient access. AfPA is organized as a non-profit 501(c)(4) corporation and headed by an independent board of directors. Its physician leadership is supported by policy advocacy management and public affairs consultants. In 2012, AfPA established the Institute for Patient Access (IfPA), a related 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. In keeping with its mission to promote a better understanding of the benefits of the physician-patient relationship in the provision of quality healthcare, IfPA sponsors policy research and educational programming.

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Maternal Vaccination Challenges

The white paper highlights two challenges related to vaccination and expectant moms.

- 1) **Inadequate data.** Determining which women experience gaps in vaccination is difficult because a comprehensive record of vaccinated pregnant women does not exist in the United States. Establishing a widely used vaccine registry or an immunization information system could help identify

coverage gaps. Once armed with this information, health care professionals and policymakers could direct targeted campaigns to reach the communities with the lowest rates.

- 2) **Poor coordination and implementation of maternal immunization programs.** The people developing programs at the federal level and the health care professionals implementing those programs in the states are not communicating well with one another. Greater collaboration is necessary for overcoming on-the-ground challenges and testing solution-driven approaches. California, for example, is piloting a program that provides clinics with Tdap starter doses so providers will have vaccines on site. This negates having pregnant women return for a subsequent appointment once the vaccine is stocked or go elsewhere to get vaccinated.

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Educating Expectant Moms

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Newborns whose mothers receive both shots during pregnancy are 81% less likely to be hospitalized with flu before six months old. They are also 78% less likely to get pertussis – whooping cough – in their first two months of life, as compared to newborns whose moms did not receive the shots.

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Despite the benefits, just 40% of expectant moms got the recommended flu and Tdap – the combination of tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis – vaccines in 2019. Rates were even lower among Black and Hispanic expectant moms. (2,3)

An Essential Part of Prenatal Care

Overcoming the challenges outlined in the paper will take time and resources. But the data supporting maternal immunization vaccine recommendations are compelling, and as the authors note, the shots are “an essential part of prenatal care.”

Fifteen prominent public health, professional and maternal health organizations contributed to the paper. Read more about the challenges and solutions in *Improving Maternal Immunization Status*.

This content article was also published at [InstituteofPatientAccess.org](https://www.instituteofpatientaccess.org)

References:

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Still a Premie?

Some preemies are born months early, at extremely low birthweights. They fight for each breath and face nearly insurmountable health obstacles.

But that's not every preemie's story.

Born between 34 and 36 weeks' gestation?

STILL A PREMIE

Just like preemies born much earlier, these "late preterm" infants can face:

- Jaundice
- Feeding issues
- Respiratory problems

And their parents, like all parents of preemies, are at risk for postpartum depression and PTSD.

Born preterm at a "normal" weight?

STILL A PREMIE

Though these babies look healthy, they can still have complications and require NICU care.

But because some health plans determine coverage based on a preemie's weight, families of babies that weigh more may face access barriers and unmanageable medical bills.

Born preterm but not admitted to the NICU?

STILL A PREMIE

Even if preterm babies don't require NICU care, they can still face health challenges.

Those challenges can extend through childhood, adolescence and even into adulthood.

Some Preemies	All Preemies
Will spend weeks in the hospital	Face health risks
Will have lifelong health problems	Deserve appropriate health coverage
Are disadvantaged from birth	Need access to proper health care

NCJIH National Coalition for Infant Health
Protecting Access for Premature Infants through Age Two
www.infanthealth.org