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**IMMUNIZEVA ENCOURAGES VIRGINIANS TO PRIORITIZE CHILDHOOD VACCINATIONS**

***Childhood vaccines can protect from serious diseases and death***

**(RICHMOND, Va.)** — Babies depend on their parents and guardians to make critical decisions to keep them safe. April 25-29 is National Infant Immunization Week, an opportunity to remind caregivers about the importance of protecting children age two and younger from vaccine-preventable diseases.

ImmunizeVA, the Institute for Public Health Innovation, the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and Minus 9 to 5, an initiative of Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS), are working to encourage Virginians to maintain the recommended youth [vaccine schedul](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/immunization/requirements/)e. Children should get vaccinated during their next doctor’s visit or at their local [Virginia Department of Health](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/). The [Virginia Vaccines for Children](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/immunization/vvfc/) program provides vaccines at no cost to children for eligible caregivers.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many disruptions in families’ lives. In some cases, it has meant that children have missed or delayed their wellness checkups and critical vaccines,” said Michael Martin, MD, FAAP, President of the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. “Vaccines are critical to ensuring children stay healthy.” Infants, small children, and pregnant women should catch up on missed vaccinations to protect themselves and their communities before returning to school, summer camp, and other in-person settings ([GCCF](https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2021/07/15/urgent-action-needed-to-catch-up-on-routine-childhood-vaccinations/)).

The 2021 Virginia Annual Immunization Survey saw a notable decrease in kindergarten entry vaccination rates. From 2019 to 2020, the percentage of immunizations required for school entry decreased from 84.8 to 80.4 percent ([VDH](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.vdh.virginia.gov%2Fcontent%2Fuploads%2Fsites%2F11%2F2016%2F04%2FVAISCompliance.pdf&clen=461015&chunk=true)). “Kindergarten readiness includes being immunized and healthy, ready to learn,” said Dr. Jane Elyce Glasgow, Executive Director, EVMS Minus 9 to 5. The organization’s [2022 Hampton Roads Early Childhood COVID-19 response/recovery agenda](https://t4.evms.edu/terminalfour/SiteManager?ctfn=download&fnno=60&ceid=4bca3a9d6dec398bfdd350430f222fd3190df15c) prioritizes educating families about the importance of on-time, well-child visits, and immunizations.

According to the [Georgetown Center for Children and Families](https://ccf.georgetown.edu/), if vaccination rates decline below levels required to maintain herd immunity, which protects vulnerable members of society who are too old or too sick to get vaccinated, dangerous outbreaks of preventable diseases could follow.

“Virginia has a goal to protect children from vaccine-preventable disease, and we can only accomplish this with the support of parents, guardians, and healthcare providers,” said Rebecca Epstein, ImmunizeVA Senior Program Manager. “Parents are encouraged to ask pediatricians how to ensure their child stays updated on their vaccinations. It’s important to talk to pediatricians or trusted healthcare professionals to get the facts. Vaccine trust is built through millions of conversations between parents, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and community members.”

Healthcare providers are encouraged to provide parents and guardians information to learn more. National Infant Immunization Week offers the opportunity to promote vaccine conversations at all community levels.

To learn more or increase action and awareness, please visit [www.ImmunizeVirginia.org](http://www.ImmunizeVirginia.org) or email: [ImmunizeVA@institutephi.org](mailto:ImmunizeVA@institutephi.org).

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**About ImmunizeVA**

Founded in 2020, ImmunizeVA is a statewide coalition of medical and public health professionals and community stakeholders united in their commitment to a future where vaccine-preventable diseases do not impact the quality and length of life of all Virginians. Follow ImmunizeVA on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @ImmunizeVa.

**About Institute for Public Health Innovation**

IPHI develops multi-sector partnerships and innovative solutions to improve the public’s health and well-being across the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. IPHI’s work strengthens health systems and policy, enhances conditions that promote health, and builds community capacity to ensure equitable health opportunities. This non-profit is one of over 40 public health institutes across the country and is a member of the National Network of Public Health Institutes. For more information, visit [*www.institutephi.org*](http://www.institutephi.org). Follow IPHI on Facebook and Twitter @InstitutePHI.