

Improve Healthcare Access for North Dakota residents by Making COVID-19 Pharmacy Immunization Authority Permanent and Extended to All Routine Vaccinations

To safely reopen our nation and keep North Dakota residents healthy, it is imperative to increase immunization capacity, including COVID-19 immunization. Community pharmacy team vaccinators have played a central, supporting role in the nation's initiative to vaccinate priority populations, and the broader public, and stop the spread of COVID-19 and other vaccine preventable diseases. Accessible in communities across North Dakota and long trusted by patients to efficiently and safely provide critical vaccine services, pharmacists and their staff have stepped up to continue to meet American's vaccines needs in this critical time. The pharmacy immunization flexibilities provided during COVID-19 should extend beyond the pandemic, and include all routine vaccinations, to allow pharmacies to best meet patient preventive care needs across communities.

Key Points:

- The federal government recently exercised emergency authority to ensure that the public can receive both COVID-19 and other ACIP recommended vaccines at their trusted pharmacies.
- Community pharmacy team immunizers are vital public health partners who are already efficiently and safely vaccinating patients. Many North Dakota residents prefer and rely on their local pharmacy for vaccinations.
- Pharmacies have a proven record of meeting the public's vaccination needs during times of public health emergencies and can accelerate access to vaccines amidst public health pandemics.
- ***North Dakota laws should be modernized to enable the full range of vaccines to be provided to citizens at their neighborhood pharmacies by codifying permanent authority for pharmacists to provide essential vaccine services:***
 - ***Recognize pharmacists' ability to order, administer, bill and be reimbursed for any FDA-authorized vaccine for ages 3 and older; and***
 - ***Recognize pharmacists' authority to delegate administration of such vaccines to trained pharmacy interns and technicians.***
 - ***NACDS urges support for SB 2221 and SB 2279.***

Patients should have options to access life-saving vaccines from the healthcare provider of their choice. To accomplish this, states should update laws to permanently codify and maintain pharmacists' authority to provide essential vaccines that the public now expects to be available in pharmacies.

- Laws should be updated to recognize pharmacists' ability to order, administer, bill and be reimbursed for any FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccine for ages 3 and older; and to delegate administration of the vaccine to trained pharmacy interns and technicians.
- Additionally, laws must further be updated to fully recognize pharmacists' ability to order, administer, bill and be reimbursed for any FDA-authorized vaccine for ages 3 and older; and to delegate administration of such vaccines to trained pharmacy interns and technicians.
- During the pandemic, communities greatly benefited from the federal government exercising emergency authority under the PREP Act that allowed the public to obtain COVID-19 vaccinations, and routine childhood vaccines, from pharmacists and pharmacy staff.
- Communities and patients have become accustomed to the expanded access to preventive care in pharmacies afforded by the PREP Act flexibilities and steps should be taken to permanently codify such authority.

COVID-19 has proven that community pharmacy immunizers are vital to quickly and safely connecting the public – including medically underserved, rural, and urban communities – with needed immunizations.

- Nearly 90 percent of Americans live within 5 miles of pharmacy, and pharmacies are regularly open nights and weekends already providing easy access to routine vaccinations. Sometimes, they are the only available healthcare destination for patients in rural and underserved areas.
- High-risk Medicaid patients visit their pharmacies about 35 times a year, which creates a unique opportunity to provide important vaccine services to this critically at-risk population.
- Throughout the years, millions of patients have opted to receive the influenza and other recommended vaccines from pharmacies annually. In fact, the CDC reports that 1 in 3 adult influenza vaccines were provided at a community pharmacy during the 2018-2019 flu season.
- Recent polling indicates that 85% of Americans believe pharmacists should be allowed to provide a vaccine to protect against COVID-19.

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- A CDC study found that including pharmacies in vaccine distribution during a pandemic can help the nation vaccinate 80 percent of the population seven weeks faster. *Practically speaking, this means being able to control spread of the disease and lift different local restrictions more quickly.*
- During the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, the public health community relied heavily on pharmacists for vaccinations. Much of the nation's COVID-19 vaccination initiative builds on a decade of planning, research, and modeling with community pharmacies as a centerpiece due to lessons learned from H1N1.