

Pediatric experts warn against delaying well-child visits

CDC reports drop in recommended child vaccinations

(June 9, 2020) -- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant drop in well-child visits resulting in delays in vaccinations, delays in appropriate screenings and referrals and delays in anticipatory guidance to assure optimal health, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Families with children have had to drastically adjust their lives to help protect them from COVID-19, but delaying child well-visits, screenings and immunizations is not recommended, say pediatric experts.

Banner pediatric specialists, Andreas Theodorou, MD, a pediatrician with Banner University Medicine in Tucson and Nurul Hariadi, MD, Banner pediatric infectious disease specialist in Maricopa offer advice and reassurances to plan your next well-child visit.

Dr. Theodorou says the significant drop off in well-child visits and immunizations may result in delays in diagnoses and possibly, a secondary outbreak from vaccine-preventable illnesses such as measles, meningitis and whooping cough.

The CDC released a [study](#) that found among children aged 5 months, up-to-date status for all recommended vaccines declined from approximately two thirds of children during 2016–2019 (66.6%, 67.4%, 67.3%, 67.9%, respectively) to fewer than half (49.7%) in May 2020.

With the pandemic, delaying could even further the children’s vulnerability to preventable diseases.

“Fortunately, now we have vaccines to protect our children and teens against 16 different diseases and doctor’s offices have implemented precautions to protect the health and safety of its patients,” said Dr. Theodorou, who also is vice chair of the Department of Pediatrics at University of Arizona College of Medicine – Tucson, and chief clinical education officer with Banner University Medicine.

How to ensure your child’s health and well-being during COVID-19

The American Association of Pediatrics strongly supports the continued care of children during the COVID-19 pandemic and recently shared [recommendations](#) in managing visits safely and effectively.

Don’t delay in-person well-child visits or immunizations.

“These appointments are very important to assess your child’s normal growth and development, through physical exams, lab exams and vaccines,” Dr. Theodorou said. “Although you may think your child’s risk of contracting measles is low, things like trips to the grocery store or visits with others outside of your home can increase the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases. Don’t wait.”

Call their pediatrician or doctor’s office before coming in for an appointment.

“If the office hasn’t already relayed new office procedures, contact your child’s doctor and ask about new

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procedures for the office visit,” said Dr. Hariadi. Doctors have implemented strategies to assure safety, for example scheduling well visits and sick visits at different times of the day and separating patients spatially by placing patients with sick visits in other locations from patients with well visits.

Come prepared for your visit

Complete any necessary forms or paperwork beforehand and follow instructions given to you by the office to protect yourself and your child. “For children older than 2 years old, this may include bringing masks to wear during your appointment,” said Dr. Theodorou.

Check on telehealth capabilities

“If possible, telehealth appointments for things like rashes, minor respiratory issues and behavioral health problems may be appropriate, but for other concerns, a physical exam is crucial,” said Hariadi. “The main recommendation is not to delay care and call your child’s doctor to get the appropriate guidance in how to receive the care that your child needs.”

Heed standard social distancing and hygiene practices

According to the [CDC](#), the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus and ensure you are properly washing your hands and covering your mouth and nose while out in public. “By heeding these recommendations along with ensuring you and your child are getting proper medical care, you can reduce your risk of spreading COVID-19 or other diseases and ensure your overall health and well-being,” said Dr. Theodorou.

Need a doctor? To schedule an appointment with a pediatrician or health care provider at Banner Health, visit [bannerhealth.com](https://www.bannerhealth.com).

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