

Decline in Pediatric Immunizations Causing Concern

Well-child visits to the pediatrician and keeping up with recommended vaccines are the best things parents can do to protect their kids and communities from serious vaccine-preventable diseases that can easily spread or become life threatening.

Despite this, American children appear to be falling behind when it comes to routine vaccinations. According to [data](#) recently published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), national vaccine coverage among kindergarten children during the 2020-2021 school year dropped from 95% to lower than 94%. While that might not seem like a big decline at face value, the 1% dip represents more than 35,000 children.

Dr. Rebecca Sierra is an OSF HealthCare pediatrician in Bloomington, Illinois. She says the downward trend in inoculations is most likely a side effect of the pandemic.

“I think the problem has been with COVID just getting people into the office, keeping them up to date on their visits and up to date on their vaccines,” explains Dr. Sierra. “So I think because people were trying to stay away, or maybe not enrolling in school, we've kind of missed the opportunity to vaccinate some of those kids.”

Dr. Sierra says while her office has not seen a sharp decline in the demand for routine vaccinations, the CDC's findings remain concerning. A decrease in vaccination rates could result in fewer communities maintaining herd immunity for preventable diseases like measles, mumps and whooping cough.

“We want a certain percentage of kids to be vaccinated in order to have herd immunity to keep those viruses out of the community. So as that number goes down, we're increasing the risk of those viruses like measles and things that we don't typically see making a comeback and circulating again,” says Dr. Sierra.

Dr. Sierra says the key to bucking this trend is for parents to keep up with yearly well-child visits. These visits are an important component to keeping up with routine immunizations, allowing pediatricians to remind parents about recommended vaccines and vaccination schedules and to address any concerns parents may have regarding their child's health.

“If they haven't had a routine physical within the last year they definitely need to check in and make sure that there's nothing that we're missing,” she urges. “I know a lot of offices do go through and try to contact some of those patients, but we don't always have up to date contact information. So definitely, if they haven't been seen by a provider within the last year, I would definitely reach out and make sure that we're not missing anything for them.”

If you have questions about your child's vaccination schedule or about vaccines in general, Dr. Sierra recommends reaching out to your child's pediatrician. You can also check for overdue vaccinations, ask questions or schedule an appointment on [OSF MyChart](#).

If your child doesn't have a pediatrician you can find one at [osfhealthcare.org](https://www.osfhealthcare.org).