

# IL Vaccine for Children (VFC) and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP):

## Getting Started & Update for Current Providers

CME NEWSLETTER FROM THE



ILLINOIS ACADEMY OF  
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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The AAFP Vaccine Science Fellowship is supported by an unrestricted grant from Merck Sharp & Dohme Corp.

### Learning Objectives:

- Describe the benefits of becoming a VFC provider
- Understand how to begin the process of becoming a VFC provider
- Understand the differences and similarities between VFC and CHIP vaccine programs.
- Explain the differences between the VFC Program and COVID-19 vaccination program.

### Accreditation

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### Speaker & Faculty Disclosures

Anne Schneider, DO, disclosed that she has an AAFP Vaccine Science fellowship. The AAFP Vaccine Science Fellowship is supported by an unrestricted grant from Merck Sharp & Dohme Corp. Sharon Smaga, MD, (Reviewer) & IAFP staff members Kate Valentine and Sara Ortega disclosed no relevant financial relationship or interest with a proprietary entity producing, marketing, reselling, or distributing health care goods or services.

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### About the VFC program and why become a Vaccines for Children provider

The [Vaccines for Children \(VFC\) program](#) was created and funded by the federal government to provide vaccines to children in the United States whose families may not already be able to afford them. The VFC program helps provide all vaccines recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to eligible children under the age of 19. This newsletter will give a brief history and overview of the VFC program, list benefits of becoming a VFC provider, and give information on how to begin the process of becoming a VFC provider.

The Vaccines for Children program was created because of the 1989-1991 measles epidemic in the US. An investigation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that more than half of the children infected by measles during this epidemic had not received a measles vaccine. On August 10, 1993, Congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) which created the Vaccines for Children program. VFC became operational on October 1, 1994. As of 2016, there were over 44,000 physicians enrolled in the VFC program.<sup>1</sup>

There are three groups involved in the VFC program. The awardees, providers, and parents/ guardians. The CDC purchases vaccines from pharmaceutical companies at a discount price and distributes them to state public health departments (the awardees). The awardees are responsible for managing the VFC program which includes recruiting providers, distributing vaccines, evaluating performance, monitoring for fraud and abuse of the program, and conducting site visits. The Illinois Department of Public Health is responsible for managing the VFC program in all areas of Illinois except in the city of Chicago, where The Chicago Health Department is responsible. Providers are physicians' offices and public health clinics that have enrolled in the VFC program. Providers are expected to understand and comply with the VFC program requirements to participate in the program. VFC providers must offer all vaccines in accordance with ACIP recommendations. The final group involved in the VFC program

are parents/ guardians of children receiving vaccines. Parents and guardians should be made aware of eligibility criteria and where their children can get vaccinated.

Children are eligible to receive vaccines through VFC up until their 19th birthday if they are Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, underinsured, or are Indigenous Americans or Indigenous Alaskans as defined by the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act. Underinsured children are those whose insurance does not cover vaccines, insurance only covers select vaccines, or whose insurance coverage is capped.<sup>2</sup> Children who are covered by the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), also known as All Kids in Illinois, cannot receive VFC vaccines and must receive CHIP vaccines. However, as of September 1, 2019, in Illinois, CHIP vaccines are being provided to those eligible children through the VFC program. For more information related to VFC and CHIP vaccines in Illinois, [click here](#).

There are benefits for all groups involved in the VFC program. Awardees, or public health departments benefit from fewer referrals of children for vaccination. Providers not only receive vaccines used through the VFC program at no cost, but they can also charge a fee to offset the cost of administering the vaccines. Providers will be able to provide all ACIP-recommended vaccines to their eligible patients in their medical home. VFC providers contribute to increasing vaccination rates amongst some of the most vulnerable populations. For parents and guardians, the VFC program eliminates or reduces the barriers of cost and of need to travel to a public health department to get their children vaccinated.

Those providers interested in enrolling in the VFC program need to meet program requirements. The Vaccines for Children Program Manual for Illinois VFC Providers summarizes these requirements. Requirements include providers must be licensed in Illinois to administer vaccines to children 18 and under, have the capacity to manage and safely store vaccines, and be open at least 4 consecutive hours for three days a week to receive VFC vaccines. VFC providers must sign the CDC's Provider Agreement and must ensure proper screening and documentation of patient eligibility. Additionally, VFC providers must follow the CDC's guidelines for vaccine management listed in the Vaccine Storage and Handling Toolkit. This includes creating standard operating procedures for routine and emergency management. VFC providers must follow ACIP recommendations when administering vaccines. VFC providers must report adverse reactions to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS).<sup>2</sup>

### Getting Started as a VFC Provider

To get started, providers who would like to participate in the VFC program will need to enroll in the [Illinois Comprehensive Automated Registry Exchange \(I-CARE\)](#) first, as enrollment in the VFC program is submitted through I-CARE. VFC providers will also manage their vaccines through I-CARE. I-CARE is a web-based application that was developed by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to allow immunization record sharing amongst healthcare providers.<sup>3</sup> It allows for participants to access information on immunizations administered outside their practices. I-CARE is helpful in many other ways in that it calculates immunization due dates, has a reminder/recall feature to notify patients of due dates for vaccines, and contains up to date Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) for use in offices. I-CARE can also track vaccine usage and rates by practice.<sup>3</sup> I-CARE requires a user have high-speed internet.

**Vaccines for Children**  
Protecting America's children every day

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program helps ensure that all children have a better chance of getting their recommended vaccines. VFC has helped prevent disease and save lives.

CDC estimates that vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2018 will:

- prevent **419 million** illnesses (26.8 million hospitalizations) — more than the current population of the entire U.S.A.
- help avoid **936,000** deaths — greater than the population of Seattle, WA
- save nearly **\$1.9 trillion** in total societal costs (that includes \$406 billion in direct costs) — more than \$5,000 for each American

Updated 2018 analysis using data from "Benefits from Immunization during the Vaccines for Children Program Era—United States, 1994–2017"

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov/features/vfcprogram](http://www.cdc.gov/features/vfcprogram)



More information on software requirements, as well as how to enroll in I-CARE can be found on the IDPH website. IDPH has created various I-CARE training tools which can also be found on their website.<sup>3</sup>

Once enrolled in VFC, providers must have an enrollment site visit before being able to start ordering vaccines. The purpose of the site visit is for providers to learn about the program

requirements. The visit will determine if the VFC provider has the appropriate vaccine storage and handling capability and confirm that the provider is aware of whom to contact if problems arise. VFC providers will be educated on important aspects of the program during this visit as well. The VFC program requires annual trainings be completed by providers.

### **VFC program Frequently Asked Questions and Answers**

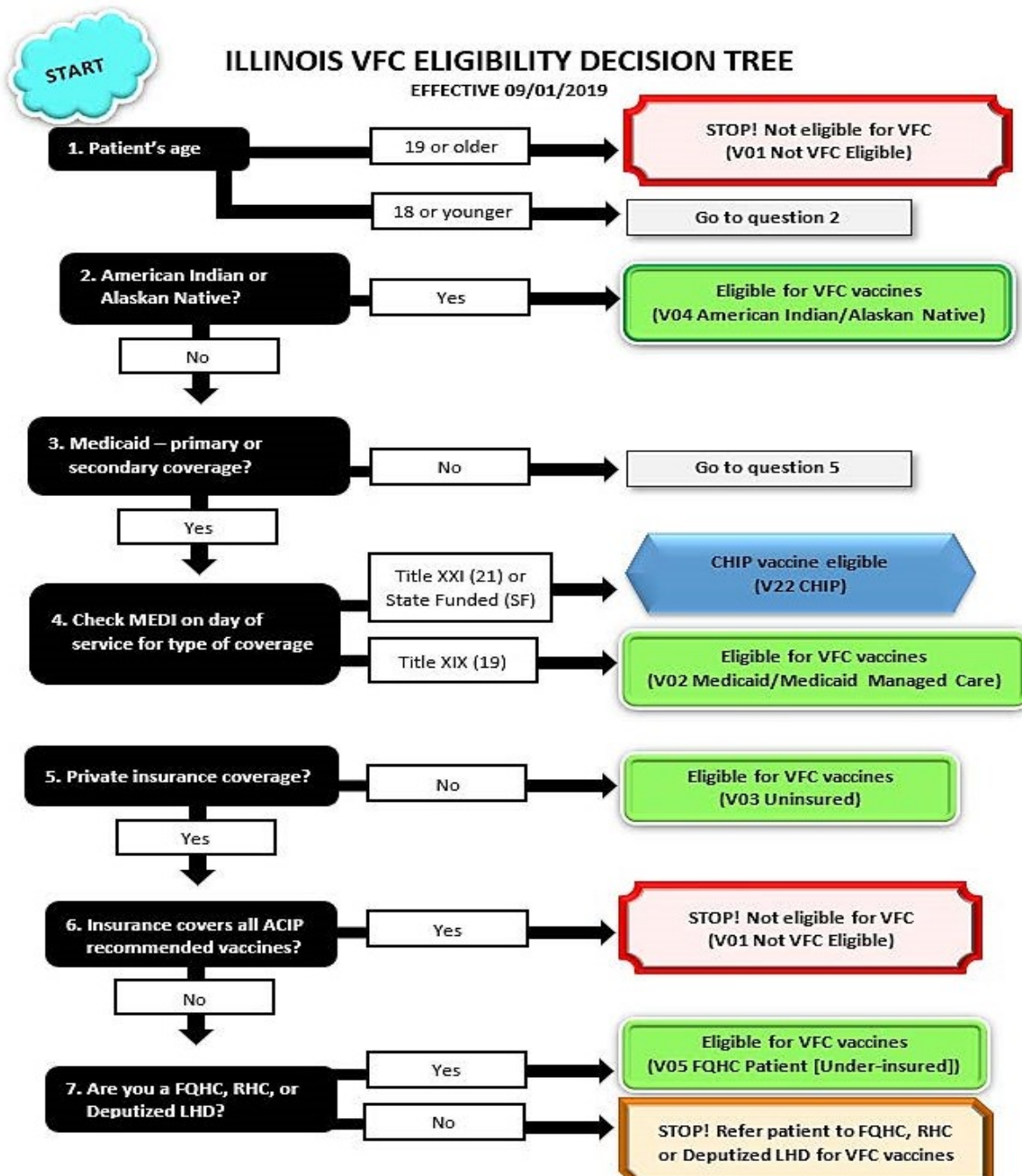
The following are some provider Frequently Asked Questions and Answers regarding the VFC program:

1. Once I'm enrolled in the VFC program will I need to ever reapply?  
*Yes. The VFC program requires a provider complete enrollment annually to recertify their participation.*
2. Can I terminate my enrollment as a VFC Provider?  
*Yes. The Illinois VFC program or the provider can terminate the agreement at any time.*
3. What is the age of eligibility for children to receive vaccines through the VFC program?  
*Children who meet other eligibility requirements can receive immunizations through the VFC program until the day of their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.*
4. I have a mobile vaccine clinic, may I administer VFC vaccines out of the mobile clinic?  
*Yes, VFC vaccines can be administered via a mobile clinic. The storage and handling requirements for VFC vaccines must still be met.*
5. Can I charge a fee for administering VFC vaccines?  
*Yes. As of January 1, 2013, the administration fee cap is \$23.87 per vaccine dose.<sup>2</sup>*
6. I am a provider in the city of Chicago. How do I enroll in the VFC program?  
*To learn more about the city of Chicago's VFC program, please click the following link:  
<https://www.chicagohan.org/vfc>.*
7. I am a Family Medicine physician in private practice in Southern Illinois. I am interested in reducing the rate of vaccine-preventable diseases by increasing vaccination rates for all children. How can I provide vaccines to my uninsured, Indigenous Americans or Indigenous Alaskans, and Medicaid insured patients?

***Enroll in the Illinois Vaccines for Children Program!!***

## CHIP

[Children's Health Insurance Program \(CHIP\)](#) is a state and federally funded program that provides low-cost health insurance to children whose family income is higher than that needed to qualify for Medicaid but is not enough to purchase private insurance. In Illinois, CHIP is also known as All Kids.<sup>4</sup> Children insured via CHIP are not eligible to receive VFC vaccines and must receive CHIP vaccines. As of September 1, 2019, the Illinois VFC program provides CHIP vaccines. VFC providers who administer vaccines to CHIP-eligible children place orders through the VFC program for CHIP vaccines as well as their VFC vaccines.<sup>2</sup> VFC providers must monitor and update their patient population information at least annually to have an accurate determination of which pediatric patients are VFC participants and which are CHIP patients. Page 17 of the Vaccines for Children Program Manual for Illinois VFC Providers includes a decision tree that is helpful in determining if a patient's eligibility.<sup>2</sup>



## I-Care

The Illinois Comprehensive Automated Immunization Registry Exchange (I-CARE) is a web-based registry developed by IDPH as a way for healthcare providers to share the immunization records of Illinois residents. I-CARE not only allows healthcare providers to see records of vaccines that their patients have received outside of their office, but it also calculates immunization due

dates, tracks vaccines usage, and contains up to date Vaccine Information Statements (VIS).<sup>3</sup> Providers apply and reenroll annually to the VFC program through I-CARE. Documentation of eligibility, ordering of vaccines, inventory tracking is all done through I-CARE.<sup>2</sup>



## Update for VFC Providers regarding COVID-19 Vaccine for Children

VFC providers have one particularly important update regarding the COVID-19 vaccine for children. At the time of this writing, the FDA has approved Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) to the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for 5-15-year-old children and full approval for use in people aged 16 and older.<sup>5</sup> As of December 10, 2021, 22.3% of children 5-11 in Illinois have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. At that time, the county with the highest rate of vaccination for COVID-19 in 5-11-year-olds was Champaign at 33.3%. Southern Illinois counties make up most of the lowest vaccinated counties for COVID-19 for the 5-11-year-old group.<sup>6</sup>

VFC providers have an important opportunity to vaccinate their pediatric population age 5 and up by also participating in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) COVID-19 Vaccination program. VFC providers are already knowledgeable in vaccine administration and federal vaccine programs, and therefore could easily begin participation in the COVID-19 Vaccination program. It is important to note, though similar in some ways, the VFC program and the COVID-19 Vaccination program have different requirements. Therefore, those VFC providers who would like to also participate in the COVID-19 Vaccination program will need to complete a separate agreement form.<sup>7</sup> There are some key differences between the two programs. Whereas VFC vaccines are available to eligible children through age 18, the CDC's COVID-19 Vaccination Program is currently available for ages 5 and up. While VFC providers may charge an administration fee for administering VFC vaccines, they cannot charge an administrative fee for administering COVID-19 vaccines. COVID-19 vaccines that are wasted, expired, or spoiled should not be returned to the distributor, whereas those VFC vaccines should be returned to the distributor.<sup>7</sup> Illinois VFC providers are well-equipped to assist in ending the COVID-19 pandemic by participating in the CDC's COVID-19 Vaccination program to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates.

## In Conclusion

Becoming a VFC or CHIP/All Kids vaccine provider benefits both the patient and provider. Underinsured or non-insured children receive their ACIP recommended vaccinations despite a lack of insurance coverage. Providers not only receive vaccines used through the VFC at no cost, but they may charge a fee to offset the cost of administering the vaccine. Providers can contribute to increasing vaccination rates among underserved populations by circumventing cost as a reason for vaccine hesitancy. Enrolling in I-CARE is simple and will help both patients and their communities.

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## IAFP RESOURCES

[www.iafp.com/seasonal-influenza](http://www.iafp.com/seasonal-influenza)

[www.iafp.com/immunizations-vaccines](http://www.iafp.com/immunizations-vaccines)

## Citations

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