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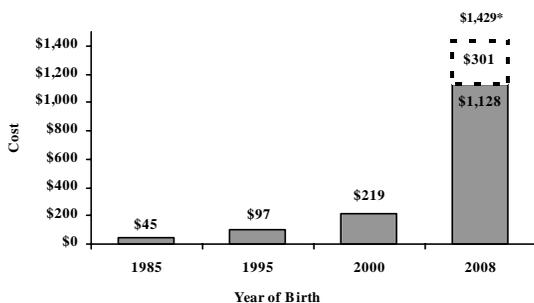
Bulletin No. 21 November 3, 2008

Alaska to Initiate Federal Vaccines for Children Program for Human Papillomavirus and Meningococcal Vaccines

Background

For over 30 years the Alaska Immunization Program has maintained a universal vaccine program, distributing all recommended pediatric and selected adult vaccines at no cost to Alaska health care providers. This vaccine distribution has been supported almost entirely with two sources of federal funding. **Vaccines for Children (VFC)** pays for vaccines for children who meet certain federal criteria, and **Section 317 of the U.S. Public Health Service Act (317)** covers the cost of vaccines for the approximately one-third of Alaska children who are not VFC-eligible. As a federal entitlement program, VFC funding increases to support newly recommended vaccines. However, 317 funding has not kept pace with rapidly rising vaccine costs, which have risen more than thirty-fold since 1985 (Table).

Table. Alaska Immunization Program Estimated Cost to Purchase Recommended Vaccines for One Child from their Year of Birth through Age 18 Years, for Selected Years--1985 through 2008



* Because human papillomavirus vaccine is recommended only for females, the 2008 estimated cost is \$1,429 for females and \$1,128 for males.

Increases in the cost and number of recommended vaccines have made it increasingly more difficult to maintain Alaska's universal vaccine policy, necessitating the important changes outlined below (Box).

Box. Beginning January 1, 2009:

- Two state-supplied vaccines will be distributed for use only with children who qualify for the VFC program.
 - Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine (Gardasil®)
 - Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4/ Menactra®)
- Alaska providers must conduct VFC screening when using any state-supplied pediatric vaccine. However, only HPV and meningococcal vaccines are restricted for use in persons who meet VFC eligibility criteria.
- Young women who have begun the HPV vaccine series but who are not VFC-eligible will need to make alternative arrangements to continue the vaccine series.

VFC Eligibility Criteria

Vaccines for Children (VFC) pays for vaccines for children aged 18 years or younger who meet at least one of the following federally-established eligibility criteria:

- Medicaid eligible;
- Alaska Native or American Indian;
- Uninsured;
- Underinsured (i.e., has insurance but it does not cover the costs of vaccines) and receiving services at a Federally Qualified Health Center.

VFC Impact on Alaska Health Care Practices

- **Provider Enrollment** – To receive vaccines from the Alaska Immunization Program, health care providers must enroll/re-enroll by January 1, 2009. New Provider Enrollment Packets and VFC educational materials will be mailed in November, as well as being available at the Alaska Immunization Program website listed below under “Resources”.
- **VFC Eligibility Screening and Documentation** – All pediatric vaccine recipients must be screened for VFC eligibility each time they receive a state-supplied vaccine. Patients are not required to supply proof of VFC eligibility. Screening is required for all vaccine recipients, including patients who clearly fall into a VFC eligibility category (e.g., Alaska Natives). Screening documentation must be maintained only for patients who are determined to be VFC-eligible. The documentation is placed in the patient's written or electronic medical record during the initial immunization visit; additional documentation is required only if there is a change in the patient's VFC eligibility status. Screening documentation must be maintained for at least three years.

Providers must conduct VFC eligibility screening when using any state-supplied pediatric vaccine to support the use of VFC vs. 317 funds for vaccine purchases. This increased accountability is required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in order for Alaska to maintain federal funding support for vaccines.

- **Vaccine Accountability** – “VFC only” vaccines (HPV and meningococcal) must be segregated from non-VFC vaccines during storage, and vaccine usage reporting submitted to the Alaska Immunization Program must clearly differentiate between “VFC only” and universal or privately purchased vaccines.

Other Vaccine Funding Options

Meningococcal and HPV vaccines are covered by many private insurance plans, though coverage will vary between policies. Medicaid covers the majority of the cost for eligible recipients aged 19–20 years. In addition, women aged 19–26 years who meet income eligibility requirements may qualify to receive HPV vaccine through Merck & Co.'s Vaccine Patient Assistance Program.

Resources

- Alaska Immunization Program
269-8000 or 1-888-430-4321
<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/immune.stm>
- Merck Vaccine Patient Assistance Program
<http://www.merck.com/merckhelps/vaccines/home.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, VFC Program
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/default.htm>