

BACK TO THE DOCTOR

TIP SHEET

Alabama Chapter

INCORPORATED IN ALABAMA

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented time for our world and country, and pediatric practice is no different. Pediatricians in Alabama have had to make adjustments to office processes and policies, such as scheduling and modifying exam and waiting room areas to reduce the potential exposure and spread of the virus. We know you are monitoring and making adjustments regularly due to changes in coverage and the evolving “safer at home” orders and clinical guidelines. We also know that every practice is different and must decide how to deliver care to patients in the safest ways possible.

With guidance from the Alabama Department of Health (ADPH), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AL-AAP) began offering guidance to its members and pediatricians throughout the state on ways to continue to safely care for their patients in the midst of the pandemic.

With ADPH ImmPRINT data showing a 54 percent decrease in immunizations from March – May 2020 compared to that same period in 2019, the time is now to communicate to parents about the importance of getting back in to get vaccinations. Starting in mid-July, the AL-AAP and ADPH embarked on a public education/marketing campaign, “Back to the Doctor” and “Back to Vaccines” to do just that. See <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/immunization/outreach.html>

Practices, however, must join us in communicating with their own families and doing what is best for their patient population. Many of you have already taken these steps; others could use some resources.

Below are some tips, resources and example messaging:

Steps to consider

- Inform patients of your practice’s safety measures
- Adjust visit workflow as needed throughout stages of pandemic
- Launch a patient recall initiative
- Clean up your practice’s patient list before you do a large recall
- Perform recalls for specific patients and needs
- Stay up to date on billing and coding requirements under COVID-19
- Create a library of resources and links for your patients and families

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Patient Recall: Things to Consider

Why patient recall efforts are so important?

- Preventative care's normal benefits are increased right now: Alabama Medicaid and Blue Cross Blue Shield have continued to extend their coverage of telehealth visits for well and sick visits.
- Pediatricians identify abuse and neglect: during the pandemic, there have been fewer sets of eyes on kids.
- AAP Guidance Promotes Preventive Care: As of the date of this writing, the AAP strongly encourages pediatricians to continue with their preventive care services.
- Employment uncertainty means health insurance uncertainty: Get your patients seen now while families still have health insurance.
- Now is the time: Your practice should schedule patients now before schools are back in session.
- Your performance-based measures are still in play: performance-based payments will be vital this year.
- When practices fully reopen and school is in full swing, there will be too much demand to see everyone: Some children will go without their preventive care visits if they are missed now.
- Stay in business so you can continue to provide care: Use patient recall to increase visit volume in order to stay in business, and you will be able to continue to care for your community when things return to normal.

Which patients should you identify and recall for appointments, and when?

- **Overdue Well Visits for any age group:** Increases patient flow
- **Children under the age of 2:** Performing standardized developmental and postpartum depression screening as well as delivering timely vaccines.
- **Don't forget about adolescents:** Overdue vaccines and age-appropriate screening
- **Overdue vaccines (school/daycare required):** Recall patients who are overdue (or are about to become overdue) for any of the vaccines needed for daycare or school.
- **Telehealth friendly visits:**
 - **High BMI and Obesity Management:** Recall patients who have a high BMIs or known obesity concerns for a follow-up plan.
 - **Depression and Anxiety:** Recall patients who have active depression or anxiety diagnoses (or active medications for these conditions).
 - **ADHD:** Recall patients who are on ADHD medications who need a follow up.
 - **Asthma:** Recall patients with asthma diagnoses who need a medication follow up or who need adjustments to their Asthma Action Plans.
 - **Care Plans:** Recall patients with active Care Plans that may need review or adjustment during the pandemic.
 - **Referrals:** Follow up on open referrals and other incomplete orders. This work is a vital Care Management service.

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Communicating to families

Let your families know about the safety measures you have put in place in your office:

- Let them know that your office is open and following the recommendations from the AAP, the Alabama Department of Public Health and the CDC to keep patients safe during the pandemic.
- Use multiple communication efforts! Communicate via postcards, text messaging, and social media, “We are here for you by phone, telehealth, in-person” by using the AAP’s #Call Your Pediatrician Campaign. Use this link to access easy-to-use messaging: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/campaigns/call-your-pediatrician/Pages/default.aspx>

Communications Examples for Providers

Template letter to families

Providers can use the letter below as a customizable template to send to families encouraging them to return to the office for well child visits and vaccinations.

Hello from [Insert Practice Name]!

We hope that this note finds you and your family safe and healthy! We want to thank you for being flexible and understanding as we adjust office protocols to keep patients and families as safe as possible during this unprecedented pandemic.

Currently, Governor Kay Ivey’s “safer at home” orders allow for **safe** healthcare visits. We believe it is of the utmost importance to keep our patients healthy and on track for regular check-ups in order to avoid other illness and health problems. As a reminder, our practices has adopted numerous safety measures, such as [insert changes made such as separate healthy/sick hours and rooms, triage in parking lot, telehealth, etc]. It is our goal to see every patient that needs our services in a timely manner.

For patients who require an appointment for a “non-contagious” issue, please call our office to discuss the necessity of an in-person appointment. This includes wellness visits and visits for non-contagious infections. If it is safe and appropriate, appointments may be delayed or conducted through telehealth. If an in-person visit is necessary, please rest assured that we are taking extra precautions in cleaning of all equipment and examination rooms and limiting your contact with others.

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For children ages 2 and under, it is especially important to maintain regularly scheduled well check appointments and stay up-to-date on immunizations despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Well-child visits and vaccinations for young children are necessary to monitor early growth and help them build immunity to preventable diseases. If your child is behind on vaccinations or is due for a vaccine in the near future, please call our office to schedule an appointment. If you are unsure if your child is up to date or in need of a vaccine, please call and ask our office staff to check their record.

For patients who are sick and require an in-person visit, please call our office to schedule an appointment during sick patient hours. We request that sick patients be accompanied by ONE healthy parent or guardian and, if possible, that no siblings be brought along to the office. If appropriate, we may avoid in-person visits and treat patients through telehealth.

We have developed the following protocols for sick visits:

[discuss specific procedures for sick patients such as calling at arrival and remaining in vehicle until stay in car until you have further instructions, payment and forms online, etc.]

These measures are temporary and are in line with guidance from the CDC and LDH. Policies will be adjusted as needed to follow direction by LDH and the CDC. We believe that the policies discussed above will help to maintain the best health environment for all of our patients.

Sincerely

[Insert Practice Name]

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Phone call scripts

Sample Messages for Staff to Call Parents:

On track vaccinations:

"Hi! This is (name) from (practice). I am calling to touch base regarding your child's wellness visit and vaccinations. It is very important to stay on track with these appointments, as missing them can lead to issues later down the road. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, we are doing everything that we can to ensure the health and safety of our patients. Please give us a call if you have any questions or if there is anything that we can do for you. See you soon!"

Newborn appointments:

"Hi! This is (name) from (practice). I am calling on behalf of everyone at (practice name) to congratulate you on the arrival of your baby. We are so thrilled for you and your family! As you may know, newborn checkups and on-time administration of vaccines are very important. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, we encourage you to keep your scheduled appointments or schedule one if you haven't already done so. Please let us know if you have any questions or if there is anything that we can do for you. See you soon!"

COVID-19:

"Hi! This is (name) from (practice). I hope that you and your family are in good health and staying safe. I am just calling to let you know that all of us at (practice name) are thinking of you. We are here to support you during this unprecedented time. We have modified our practice policies to minimize our patients' exposure to others. So please let us know if you have any questions or if there is anything else that we can do for your family. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, we are still seeing patients in the office or by telehealth when appropriate, so if you have any patient care concerns, please let us know. We hope to see you soon!"

Sick-child visits:

"Hi! This is (name) from (practice). I am calling to share some news with you regarding the services that we are offering to our patients. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, we are continuing to treat sick patients in a variety of ways. We are offering telehealth visits for concerns that can be treated virtually, or, if need be, in-person visits are available as well. For those children who need an office visit, we have modified our practice policies to minimize office exposure to others. Please don't put off getting medical attention when your children need it. Give us a call if you have any questions or if there is anything that we can do for you. Take care!"

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Sample Language for Social Media Post

AAP #Call Your Pediatrician Campaign Materials - <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/campaigns/call-your-pediatrician/Pages/default.aspx>

The time is now!

Immunizations are key to maintain children's health. If your child is scheduled for a routine vaccination, don't wait! Contact our office now!

Stay on track with vaccinations!

Washing your hands and social distancing help prevent COVID-19 and routine immunizations help prevent many other dangerous illnesses. Contact us to learn about available vaccination options.

Well child care is important, even during a pandemic.

Wash your hands often and contact us to discuss regular well child visit options.

Don't delay! Even during social distancing, children need checkups.

Well child visits and routine immunizations are important, especially now. Children keep growing and it's important that they stay on track with checkups and vaccinations. Contact us to see what checkup options are available.

We are here for you!

By phone, through telehealth or in person, we are here for you. Call us today to learn about what options are available for your child's visits and vaccinations.

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Sample Images for Social Media Use

Click on each image to download. You can download all images here.



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COVID-19 Resources

Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics Coronavirus Resource page:
(Includes coding guidance, webinar recordings, and all links, including those below)

<https://www.alaap.org/covid-19-guidance-for-al-aap-members>

Alabama Chapter-AAP COVID-19 Page for Parents

<https://www.alaap.org/covid19>

American Academy of Pediatrics Critical Updates on COVID-19:

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/>

Healthy Children: <https://healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx>

Alabama Department of Health COVID-19 Main Page:

<https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/index.html>

Alabama Department of Public Health Immunization Program:

<https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/immunization/index.html>

ADPH/AL-AAP Back to the Doctor Campaign

<http://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/immunization/outreach.html>