

## VACCINATIONS ARE CRITICAL TO CHILD WELL-BEING



### HEALTHCHEK SERVICES ARE COVERED BY MEDICAID AND INCLUDE:



Preventive checkups for newborns, infants, and toddlers.



Twelve complete medical exams during a baby's first two and a half years of life: at birth, 3-5 days of age and at 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 24, and 30 months. After that, children receive yearly exams.

Healthchek provides a robust list of benefits for babies and children:

- ✓ Age appropriate physical exams
- ✓ Reviews of physical and mental development
- ✓ Vision, dental, and hearing screenings
- ✓ Nutrition checks
- ✓ Developmental screenings
- ✓ Laboratory tests for certain ages
- ✓ Lead testing
- ✓ Immunizations
- ✓ Medically necessary follow-up care
- ✓ Inpatient or outpatient hospital care
- ✓ Clinic visits
- ✓ Prescription drugs
- ✓ Health education

As we enter the month of May and our second month of social distancing in an effort to flatten the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new danger threatens to raise its head.

Although children haven't typically been directly affected by COVID-19, many aspects of their lives have been disrupted, including medical care. There is a growing concern that parents are postponing the regularly scheduled immunizations for their children out of fear of exposing them to the coronavirus or because of limited appointment availability with their pediatricians.

If children aren't receiving immunizations, especially during the first 18 months of life, a significant vaccine gap could occur. This vaccine gap jeopardizes not only the unvaccinated child, but immunocompromised children and adults who can't get vaccinated for health reasons. A vaccine gap could

threaten entire communities by leading to a resurgence of preventable diseases like measles, mumps, rubella, and pertussis. Ohio was forward thinking when they took steps to expand telehealth during this public health crisis. Many aspects of a child's exam can be done through telehealth—but immunizations require a visit to the pediatrician's office.

***"The risk of missing well care for some children is far greater than the risk of COVID-19 infection" said Kate Krueck, MD, FAAP. "Risks of school failure in grade school children; depression, anxiety and suicidality in adolescents; and asthma exacerbation related to spring allergies are all concerns pediatricians can help families address, but we need to see our patients to do so."***

Parents need to hear directly from pediatricians, whom they trust, about the importance of vaccinations and the safety of both the vaccines and bringing their children in for their shots.

According to Ohio Medicaid, children under the age of 21 enrolled in Medicaid have access to Healthchek. Healthchek is Ohio's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program that covers 12 comprehensive well-child check-ups during a child's first 30 months, and subsequent yearly exams. Services includes physical exams, developmental screenings, and immunizations.

Now is the time for Ohio health leaders to prioritize childhood immunization with the message that vaccines give children the protection they need to live long and healthy lives and keep our communities safe and well.



## UNINSURED AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

COVID-19 has exposed the weaknesses in many of our systems – and health care is at the top of that list. As the pandemic forced the closing of all but essential businesses, hundreds of thousands of Ohioans lost their jobs. Because many of those people had health insurance tied to their employment, they are now uninsured. There are options for families who have lost their insurance due to unemployment, but for most families, the cost of private health insurance is prohibitive.

Ohio's Community Health Centers (CHCs) are filling a large void in rural and urban communities by providing high-quality accessible health care to low-income individuals and families regardless of their ability to pay or insurance status. CHCs provide care to vulnerable individuals who face cultural and economic barriers that make many afraid to come forward and access health care. And as we move forward in navigating the pandemic, we must ensure that CHCs

have the resources and equipment they need to keeping Ohioans healthy and safe.

Community Health Centers educate parents on the importance of preventive care, timely immunizations, and well child checkups. During the pandemic, CHCs have adopted telehealth for medical, dental, and behavioral health services. They also support Ohioans who may need to transition from employer-sponsored coverage to other options like Medicaid or the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Like all providers on the front line, Ohio's CHCs are playing their part to not only manage overall health care needs, but to also play a critical role in public health. The historic CARES Act included more than \$1.3 billion for the 1,387 community health centers nationwide as part of the pandemic response. Centers receiving these funds may use the awards to help their communities detect COVID-19; to prevent, diagnose, and treat COVID-19; and to maintain or increase capacity and

staffing levels to address the public health emergency. Through the legislation, 51 Ohio health centers were awarded a total of \$40,779,480 in supplemental funding.

However, many CHCs struggle to secure and maintain the needed protective supplies and equipment. As federal funding for testing is distributed to CHCs, we recommend the state strategically direct and prioritize the needed PPE and testing kits to the Centers. Further, Ohio's CHCs play a critical role in addressing our state's disproportionately negative health outcomes among the poor and racial and ethnic minority communities.

As the stay-at-home order is lifted and Ohio moves towards recovery, CHCs will be handling a backlog of primary care needs delayed during the virus while meeting the needs of the growing numbers of uninsured. CHCs will naturally find themselves at the forefront of testing, contact tracing, and vaccination campaigns that must be conducted at the community level. What's more, Centers will continue to provide integrated whole person care, oftentimes providing dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, vision and other needed supplemental services so that Ohio's most vulnerable can keep their health on track.

CHCs are open for business, we need to keep them that way!

### Ohio Should Seek To:

- *Maintain the expansion of telehealth beyond the state of emergency;*
- *Preserve Medicaid coverage and services;*
- *Protect the 340B program to keep drug prices affordable; and*
- *Preserve and expand as appropriate the Ohio Primary Care Workforce Initiative.*



## Health coverage is critical to keeping families and children healthy

*Between March 8th and April 11th, almost 15% of the state's workforce (964,566 Ohio workers) filed claims for unemployment benefits*

## MEDICAID IS A LIFELINE FOR OHIO FAMILIES DURING COVID-19

Ohio faces significant job loss as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and Ohioans need support to keep their families healthy. But, the pandemic has exposed some weaknesses in our health insurance system - we must strengthen our Medicaid system for families and children during these uncertain times.

Even before the pandemic, Ohio experienced a spike in uninsured children over the last two years. Georgetown Center for Children and Families found that Ohio was one of only eight states to see its overall uninsured rate climb in 2018, and unfortunately our youngest children were the most at risk of being uninsured.

Between March 8th and April 11th, almost 15% of the state's workforce (964,566 Ohio workers) filed claims for unemployment benefits. Each of those claims represents a person and in many cases, a family. For many, health insurance is tied to employment, therefore a pink slip also means the loss of health insurance.

**Health Coverage is Critical to Keeping Families & Children Healthy.** In the middle of this public health crisis, Ohio's number one priority should be the health and safety of its residents. middle of this public health crisis, Ohio's number one priority should be the health and safety of its residents.

However, the loss of health insurance coupled with loss of employment makes this a difficult task. When individuals lose their health coverage, they begin a dangerous cycle of rationing their medication, delaying prescription refills, and avoiding physician visits when needed to avoid unaffordable medical bills. This could be life-threatening for individuals with chronic health issues, and also spells trouble for children who don't receive their well-check visits and vaccinations out of their families' fear of the costs.

**Make Medicaid Enrollment Easier for Recently Unemployed Ohioans.** Medicaid is available to many of the Ohioans who have lost their jobs, and subsequently, their health insurance. Ohio has made the commitment that access to health care should be uninterrupted during the time of the pandemic. After the public health emergency ends, however, the economy will take time to recover. Families will still

need the critical health coverage Medicaid provides and the state should act to ensure all eligible individuals remain enrolled as the economy recovers and tie continuing eligibility to the state's overall unemployment rate.

With the surge of unemployment, Ohio should consider wrapping the application for unemployment into the current human services integrated eligibility system, which qualifies families for multiple programs simultaneously. This would streamline and simplify the process for families.

Although Congress passed two important stimulus packages that provide additional funding for health care for millions and provide enhanced federal Medicaid funding to states, Ohio still needs long-term economic support and families need to feel confident that health care coverage will continue uninterrupted if needed. For many Ohioans who find themselves out of work through no fault of their own, Medicaid is a lifeline for them and their families. If there were ever a time that we needed to ensure families have access to coverage and care, it is now.