Making a strong **vaccine referral** to pregnant women

Strategies for healthcare professionals

Stocking and administering vaccines in your office may not be feasible for all prenatal healthcare professionals, often due to issues with reimbursement. By making a strong vaccine referral, you can help ensure that your pregnant patients receive the recommended influenza (flu) and tetanus toxoid, reduced diphtheria toxoid, and acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccines even if you are unable to administer them in your office. The strategies outlined are based on research with healthcare professionals and pregnant women. The goal is to strengthen vaccine referrals to increase the likelihood of patient follow through.

Making the Referral

Begin each referral with a vaccine recommendation that includes information on why the vaccine is beneficial and safe for mother and baby. Tailoring your message with scientific data or personal anecdotes may help convey the vaccine's importance to individual patients.

Provide information on where patients can get the vaccine(s) you recommend. For help locating vaccines in your area, the HealthMap Vaccine Finder is available at: http://vaccine.healthmap.org.

Always write a patient-specific prescription. This will help your patients obtain the vaccine at another location where a prescription may be required.

Anticipate questions on why patients cannot get vaccinated in your office. For example, if you stock flu vaccine, but not Tdap, be prepared to explain why you offer one vaccine but not the other.

Re-emphasize vaccine importance. Remember to emphasize the fact that just because you do not stock a specific vaccine in your office does not mean it is not important, is less important than other vaccines you do stock, or that you have concerns about its safety.

Have a plan in place to answer questions from other immunization providers who are concerned with vaccinating your pregnant patients. Questions should be answered promptly, as it is likely your patient is with them at the time they contact you.

Vaccines Routinely Recommended for Pregnant Women

It is safe for the flu vaccine and Tdap vaccine to be given to pregnant patients at the same time.

Flu Vaccine

- Is recommended for pregnant women and safe to administer during any trimester.
- Is the best way to protect pregnant women and their babies from the flu, and prevent possible flu-associated pregnancy complications.
- Is safe and can help protect the baby from flu for up to 6 months after birth. This is important because babies younger than 6 months of age are too young to get a flu vaccine.

Tdap Vaccine

- Is recommended during every pregnancy, ideally between 27 and 36 weeks gestation.
- When given during pregnancy, boosts antibodies in the mother, which are transplacentally transferred to her unborn baby. Third trimester administration optimizes neonatal antibody levels.
- Helps protect infants, who are at greatest risk for developing pertussis and its life-threatening complications, until they are old enough to start the childhood pertussis vaccine series.

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Timing the Referral

Vaccines recommended for pregnant women should be discussed with patients early in pregnancy, with the formal referral made during the recommended timeframe for administration.

- Flu vaccine: Your referral should be made as early as possible once pregnancy is confirmed. Pregnant women can be vaccinated during any trimester, keeping in mind that flu vaccine is typically available August to May, covering the duration of flu season.
- Tdap vaccine: Your recommendation and referral should be made as close to 27 weeks as possible so there is ample time during the recommendation window (between 27 and 36 weeks) to follow up and re-emphasize the importance of getting the Tdap vaccine, if the patient has not received it yet.

You may find linking the timing of the Tdap referral with another third trimester practice beneficial. Many clinicians have been successful pairing their Tdap referral with the glucose test conducted at 28 weeks.

Follow-Up after Referral

After every referral, you should follow-up with each patient during subsequent appointments to ensure the patient received the vaccine(s). It may be helpful to include a reminder in your electronic medical records (EMR).

As part of the follow-up, document vaccine receipt in each patient's medical record. If your patient did not follow through with the referral, repeat the recommendation and referral and try to identify and address any questions or concerns that she may have encountered. Your commitment to making a strong referral and following up with patients is vital to increasing vaccination rates among pregnant women and protecting them and their babies from serious diseases.

Vaccines for Pregnant Women Resources

There are several resources available to help you make an effective recommendation and referral. All are free to download and ready for color or black and white printing and reproduction.

For Your Patients

CDC Website on Pregnancy and Whooping Cough
www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant

CDC Website on Pregnancy and Flu
www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm

Vaccine Information Statement on Tdap
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/tdap.html

Vaccine Information Statement on Flu
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/flu.html

For You and Your Staff

CDC Website on Pregnancy and Whooping Cough: Information on the Tdap recommendation for pregnant women and tips on providing the best prenatal care to prevent pertussis.
www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant/HCP

ACOG Tdap Toolkit: Information and resources about Tdap vaccination, including frequently asked questions for patients and a physician script.
www.acog.org/TdapToolKit

ACOG Flu Vaccine Materials: Information and resources about flu vaccination, including frequently asked questions for patients and a physician script.
www.immunizationforwomen.org/immunization_facts/seasonal_influenza

ACOG Immunization Coding for Obstetrician-Gynecologists 2013: A guide on reimbursement and coding for vaccinations.
www.acog.org/-/media/Department-Publications/immunizationCoding.pdf

AAFP's Immunization Page: Information on vaccine schedules.
www.aafp.org/patient-care/immunizations/schedules.html

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

www.cdc.gov/whoopingcough

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