Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
An Office of the Department of Health and Human Services

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Model Plan: Prevention of Post-Immunization Syncope-Related Injuries

Syncope, also called fainting, is a temporary loss of consciousness resulting from decreased blood flow to the brain. Immunization providers should be aware of the potential for syncope associated with vaccination, particularly among adolescents. Syncope after vaccination itself is usually not a serious event, and patients generally recover within a few minutes. The main concern is injury, especially head injury. Vaccine clinic staff should take appropriate measures to prevent syncope and to readily respond to the vaccinee who feels faint.

Steps to Prevent Syncope-Related Injuries

- Make sure the patient is either seated or lying down at the time of vaccination.
- Observe patients for 15 minutes after vaccination for signs and symptoms that commonly precede syncope, such as weakness, dizziness, light-headedness, nausea, sweatiness, coldness of the hands or feet, paleness or visual disturbances.
- If vaccinee is experiencing possible signs or symptoms of fainting, take the following steps to prevent syncope and injury from falling:
  - ✓ Have the person sit or lie down immediately
  - ✓ Have the person lie flat or sit with head between knees for several minutes
  - ✓ Loosen any tight clothing and maintain an open airway
  - ✓ Apply cool, damp cloths to the patient's face and neck
  - ✓ Observe the person until symptoms completely resolve
- If vaccinee falls but does not experience loss of consciousness:
  - ✓ Check the vaccinee to determine if injury is present before attempting to move him/her
  - ✓ Place patient flat on back with feet elevated
  - ✓ Observe the person until symptoms completely resolve
- If vaccinee loses consciousness:
  - ✓ Check the vaccinee to determine if injury is present before attempting to move him/her
  - ✓ Place patient flat on back with feet elevated
  - ✓ Maintain an open airway
  - ✓ Call 911 if vaccinee does not recover immediately

References:

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