

The role of nursing in overcoming vaccine hesitancy

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Executive summary

In this deck, we will discuss the importance of vaccination and how it works, declines in vaccine uptake since the COVID-19 pandemic, social determinants of health (SDOH) and health equity, and how nurses and their work impact it all.

Nurses can have an impact on:



Awareness

Communicate with your patients about the safety profiles and value of vaccination^{1,2}



Education

Help your patients understand how vaccines actually work¹⁻⁴



Administration

Take every opportunity to vaccinate your patients⁵



Advocacy

Recognize the social factors contributing to your patients' health status and promote more equitable care for all⁶



Innovation

Identify tools and methods to keep your patients connected to health services⁶

Nurses can play a crucial role in combating vaccine hesitancy. Encourage your patients and patients' parents to help protect themselves from preventable diseases by participating in routine vaccination, and talk with them when they express concerns.^{1-3,5}

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Nurses and the vaccination process

You play a key role in the administration and organization of vaccines. Your efforts can contribute to the success of vaccine rollout campaigns.^{1,2,6}



Because they are in direct daily contact with patients, nurses serve as the main health care point of contact for patient populations. Nurses can help to educate vaccine recipients and those considering vaccination, ensuring public awareness of the benefits and risks.^{1,7}

Throughout the vaccination process, you're responsible for^{1,5}:

Communication
of vaccines' safety
profile and efficacy



Administrative safety
to ensure safe handling
and administration
of vaccines



Follow-up
including collating
vaccination data and
updating patient records

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Importance of vaccination

By helping patients understand how vaccines work, nurses can empower them to make informed health decisions.^{1-3,5}

Vaccines use very small amounts of antigens to help the immune system recognize and learn to fight serious diseases.⁸ By imitating an infection, vaccines teach the immune system how to fight off that infection in the future.^{8,9} Some vaccines may require more than one dose to build stronger immunity and/or a booster dose to bring antibody levels back up as they may wear off over time.⁹



Children

Timely vaccination throughout childhood is essential because it helps provide immunity before children are exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases.¹⁰ Pediatric nurses can play a key role in monitoring a child's status to ensure that all immunizations are being given and that children are up-to-date.¹¹



Adolescents and Teens

Teenagers also need to stay on track with vaccinations. This includes getting vaccinated against influenza (flu) and ensuring that they're caught up on any missed vaccines. Some teens may have opportunities to travel internationally, which may require additional vaccines depending on the travel destination. It is also important to ensure that vaccinations are up-to-date as they prepare to attend colleges and universities.¹²



Adults

Adults need to keep their vaccinations up-to-date. Adults may be at risk for different diseases based on age, health conditions, job, lifestyle, and travel habits.¹³

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Vaccination can help prevent dangerous diseases and save lives⁴

Vaccines have greatly reduced diseases that once routinely affected babies, children, and adults. People all over the world—including in the United States—still become seriously ill or die from diseases that vaccines can help prevent.⁴



Nurses are no exception. By the nature of your work, you and other health care providers (HCPs) are at high risk for exposure to certain diseases. Whether you work directly or indirectly with patients, you may be at risk. Make sure you are up-to-date with recommended vaccines, too, and help protect yourself.¹⁴

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Pandemic-related decline in pediatric vaccine uptake¹⁵

The global pandemic caused widespread strain on essential health services, including vaccinations. In many countries, large numbers of people missed vaccination during pandemic-related disruptions, and many have still not caught up on their needed vaccines.¹⁵

Following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) recommended vaccination schedule helps to protect children from 14 potentially serious diseases before their 2nd birthday.¹⁶

On-time vaccination may help¹⁶:

- Ensure children have all the recommended doses
- Provide early immunity prior to disease exposure and immunity once maternal antibodies wear off
- Prevent children from getting sick, developing complications from potentially serious diseases

“HCPs should be encouraged to use every visit – including well-child checks, sports physicals, and other appointments – as an opportunity to administer COVID-19 vaccines, as well as other vaccines that are due or might have been missed because of pandemic-related disruptions.”¹⁷

– José R. Romero

Director, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, CDC

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What are vaccine hesitancy and vaccine confidence?



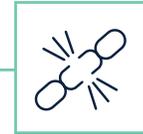
Vaccine hesitancy refers to a delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccination, which¹⁸:

- Varies across time, place, and vaccine
- Is influenced by factors such as complacency, convenience, and confidence
- Encompasses patient and/or parental attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors



Vaccine confidence refers to the trust that patients, parents, and/or HCPs have in¹⁹:

- Recommended vaccinations
- Providers who administer vaccines
- Processes that lead to vaccine licensure and the recommended vaccination schedule



Health mistrust can cause poor provider-patient relationships and lead to decreased adherence to public health recommendations. Misinformation and mistrust was prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{20,21} Nurses must recognize knowledge gaps and help empower patients through education to make informed decisions.^{1-3,5,20,21}

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Personal stories

Common scenarios on vaccine uptake



Vaccine-hesitant mother

Melissa is a 33-year-old mother with her 3-year-old daughter at the pediatrician. She knows her daughter is due for recommended vaccines, but she is worried about their safety. Melissa has questions for her nurse, and they discuss vaccine efficacy and safety profiles.



Independent student

Kayla is a 21-year-old student who lives in her own apartment. At her annual physical, her nurse recommends a vaccine that Kayla's friends have been sharing stories about. She does not know what to believe, so she asks her nurse for the facts. The nurse clarifies the truths and debunks the lies.



Traveler

Robert is a 50-year-old man who loves to travel. He has not received his recommended vaccines because he believes he is too old for vaccines to help him. He discusses this concern with his nurse, who tells him that vaccines can still help prevent certain diseases in people across the life course.

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Social determinants of health

Various factors may influence people's health. These factors are known as determinants of health.²² Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.²³

SDOH can be grouped into 5 domains²⁴:

- 1 | Economic stability
- 2 | Education access and quality
- 3 | Health care access and quality
- 4 | Neighborhood and built environment
- 5 | Social and community context

SDOH may include²²:

- Poverty
- Stigma
- Unequal access to health care
- Racism
- Lack of education



The World Health Organization (WHO) states that social determinants can be more important than health care or lifestyle choices in influencing health. Numerous studies suggest that SDOH account for 30-55% of health outcomes.²⁵

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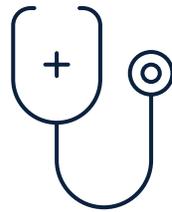
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Social determinants of health



Nurses' role in SDOH

As a profession, nurses have long been advocates for health equity and have a long-standing history of working at the intersection of health and social services. They can help identify and address underlying issues that are strong predictors of health outcomes. Because nurses generally spend more time with patients in a wide variety of settings, they are well-suited to address SDOH.^{6,7}

Improving health and health equity will require cross-sector collaborations, including enabling policies, regulations, and community interventions. Nurses alone are not sufficient to tackle SDOH, but they are uniquely positioned to serve as catalysts for change.^{7,26}

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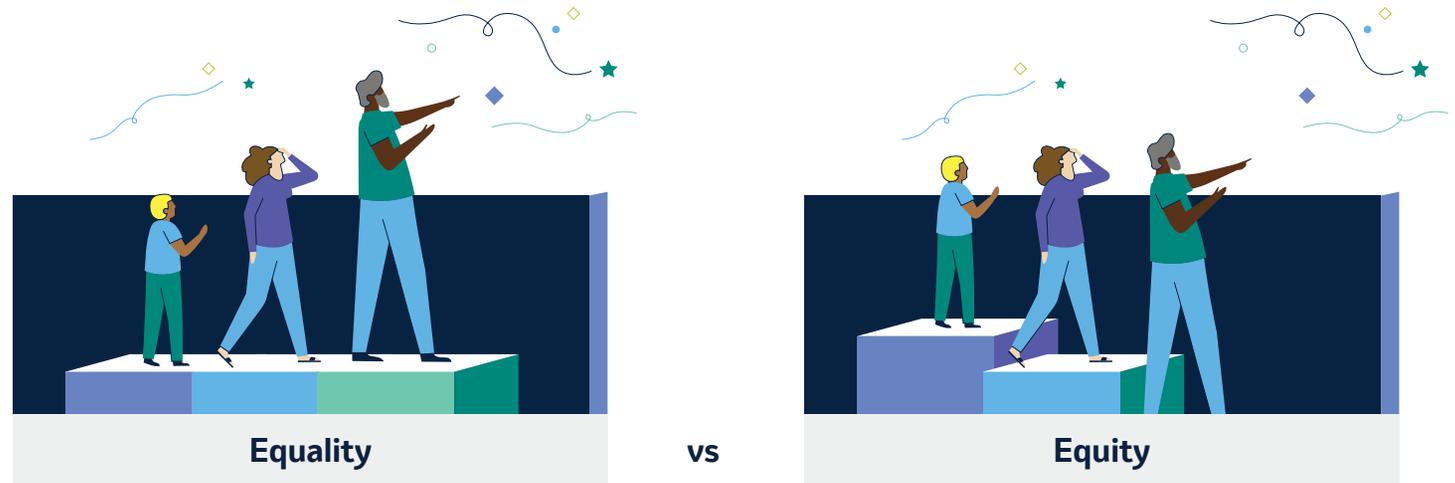
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Ensuring health equity

Health equity is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health, and vaccine equity is achieved when everyone has fair and just access to immunization.^{27,28}

Ensuring health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused efforts to address avoidable inequalities, injustices, and health care disparities.²⁹



Equality is achieved when each person or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities for their health. **Equity** involves recognizing that each person or group of people has different circumstances, and health resources should be allocated accordingly to reach an equal outcome.³⁰

Shifting nursing priorities and workflows in ways that center SDOH and health equity will require strong leadership to guide the way and to advocate for nurses' well-being.⁶

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HCP organizations recognize vaccination as essential for public health³¹⁻³³



Immunize.org³¹

- Facilitates communication about the safety, efficacy, and use of vaccines within the broad vaccination community of patients, parents, health care organizations, and government health agencies
- Works in partnership with the CDC
- Makes educational materials and resources available to help increase vaccination rates across the life course

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Providing critical services in patient health

As the backbone of health systems in the United States, you are crucial to solving our most pressing and persistent health challenges.³⁴



Nurses at all levels are present in a wide range of settings outside of traditional health care facilities, working directly in communities to provide care in schools, workplaces, and prisons.⁶



Nurses make home visits to families, provide primary care to school-age children, administer vaccines, provide health education, coordinate health care services within and across settings, and educate people on preventive measures for staying healthy.⁶



For the 21st straight year, nurses lead Gallup's annual ranking of professions for having high honesty and ethics.^{35,36}

Nurse practitioners (NPs) working in primary care are often the only providers caring for low-income or uninsured people, Medicaid beneficiaries, and historically disadvantaged groups in both rural and urban populations, who cannot always easily access a physician.⁶ These interactions create opportunities to engage meaningfully with people and families on matters related to health and well-being, health care, and the social factors that influence health.⁶

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Providing critical services in patient health

Nursing shortages amid COVID-19

In a 2021 American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) survey of more than 6,000 acute and critical care nurses, **92% of respondents reported that the pandemic had depleted nurses at their hospitals** and that, as a result, their nursing careers would be shorter than intended. **Around two-thirds of respondents said they were considering leaving the nursing profession because of their COVID-19 experiences.**³⁷

Staffing levels have an impact on mortality, length of patient stays, and preventable events such as falls and infections.³⁸ As such, in an August 2021 survey of 1,781 respondents, **47% of nurse leaders identified staff retention, furloughs, and layoffs as a significant challenge.**³⁹

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The changing and expanding role of nursing⁶

Nurses are increasingly developing new kinds of expertise while transitioning into new roles and nurse-led, alternative models of care.

This includes:

- Identifying innovative methods to keep individuals connected to health care services, such as telehealth and home care
- Moving into leadership positions in which they are serving as collaborative partners with other health care workers
- Coordinating with others in non-health care settings and areas of focus to improve overall health

As nurses, you may be called on to address persistent, widening disparities in health that have been exacerbated by the global pandemic, such as increasing needs for mental health care. You may also be called upon to expand your roles to supplement a shrinking primary care workforce, provide care to rural populations, help improve maternal health outcomes, and deliver more health and preventive care in community-based settings.



By 2030, the nursing profession will look very different than it does today:

- More than 1 million registered nurses (RNs) will retire during this decade
- An aging US patient population, many of whom will have multiple comorbid conditions
- Patient population will continue to diversify

You can contribute to reshaping the landscape of health equity over the coming decade by serving in expanded roles, working in new settings and new ways, and partnering with communities and other sectors beyond health care.

Nurses as vaccine champions

With a nurse vaccine champion in the practice, the management team can explore systemic changes and promote vaccination across the life span. Nurses are logical leaders for a multidisciplinary team that focuses on disease prevention, including vaccination. You can champion the cause of vaccinating patients and organize pre-visit planning activities to ensure that no vaccination opportunities are missed.^{5,6,40,41}

As vaccine champions, nurses can work with other clinical staff to serve as stewards and advocates of vaccinations.⁴¹ You are^{6,41}:



Innovators, implementing new office-wide strategies to increase vaccination coverage

Advocates, teaching about the importance of recommended vaccines and about the diseases they prevent

Collaborators, helping track, maintain, and order vaccines

Leaders, actively working to promote adult and childhood immunizations in your communities

Nurses can be trusted sources of health information and can work to educate their communities about preventing disease spread and dispelling vaccine-related misinformation.⁶

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Enhancing health equity⁶

Nurses can improve health equity by:



Providing care management and team-based care



Expanding the capacity of primary care, including maternal and pediatric care, mental health care, and telehealth



Providing care in school, home, work, and public health settings

Achieving health equity in the United States will require strengthened nursing capacity and expertise.

Nursing can help to create and contribute to equitable public health and health care systems that are designed to work for everyone. When you engage in the complex work of aligning public health, health care, social services, and public policies, you can help to eliminate health disparities and achieve health equity.



You can contribute to reshaping the landscape of health equity over the coming decade by serving in expanded roles, working in new settings and new ways, and partnering with communities and other sectors beyond health care.

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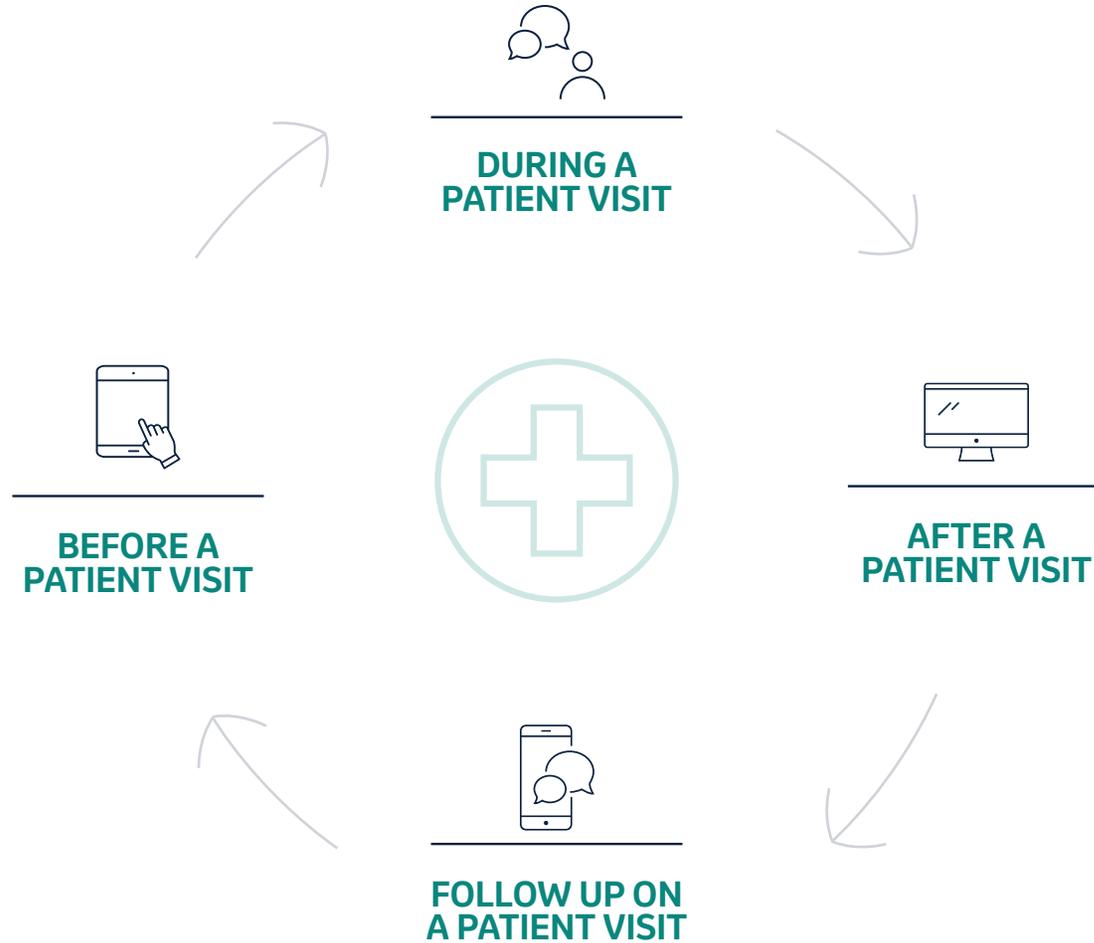
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What can you do to help?

Nurses can collaborate across your affiliated organizations to develop and deploy shared agendas for substantial, measurable improvement in health equity.⁶



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Before a patient visit^{5,42}

- Keep staff up-to-date with current vaccination recommendations
- Train staff to administer multiple vaccinations to appropriate patients when they're due
- Ensure vaccines are ordered in a timely manner and are consistently available
- Use patient reminder and recall systems



During a patient visit^{5,43}

- Implement standing orders to allow nonphysician medical personnel to independently assess and administer recommended vaccines
- Encourage patients to seek vaccinations for which they are due or overdue
- Point out personalized reasons, such as the patient's age, health status, lifestyle, or occupation, to explain why a recommended vaccine is right for a patient
- Provide vaccine information statements (VIS) and supply patients with a printed after-visit summary and provide a simple schedule of recommended vaccines and educational resources about vaccines

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After a patient visit^{42,44,45}

- Keep patient records up-to-date
- Document all administered vaccines through immunization information systems (IIS)
- Update information in patient records and communicate with patients, according to their preferences, via phone or the patient portal



Follow up on a patient visit⁴⁴

- Confirm that a patient received recommended vaccines
- Send reminders to schedule follow-up vaccination appointments

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Nurses can provide care management that helps ensure seamless care. You can also serve as advocates for patients and communities and assist in increasing individuals' trust in and engagement with the health care system.⁶



Educate



Advocate



Deliver care

In their roles as trusted professionals, nurses can provide patients with direct access to relevant information about vaccines and their importance.^{2,18}

- Use a presumptive approach when discussing vaccination schedules^{5,18}
- Speak with confidence about the risks and benefits of vaccines to patients¹

Vaccine hesitancy

- Approach conversations about vaccines using honest and respectful dialogue⁴⁶
- Acknowledge patients' concerns and answer questions about vaccine safety^{2,46}
- Familiarize patients with the established approval and monitoring processes in place to study and assess vaccine safety¹⁸
- Promote health literacy by sharing reliable information sources^{18,47}
- Allow for ongoing discussions with vaccine-hesitant families¹⁸

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Educate



Advocate



Deliver care

Communicating with patients and parents⁴²

- Provide patients and parents a simple schedule of recommended vaccinations in a language they can read
- Provide patients with documentation of the vaccinations received each time a vaccine is administered
- Provide reliable educational resources to patients and parents who have questions or concerns about vaccine safety or who want more vaccine information in a language they can read
- Inform patients and parents when the next appointment for vaccinations is due and schedule the visit before they leave the office. Put this information in an electronic recall system

Evaluate and improve your practice's performance⁴²

- Routinely assess vaccination levels of your patient population. Share the results with all staff, and use this information to develop strategies to improve vaccination rates

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Educate



Advocate



Deliver care

Missed opportunities for vaccination often occur if HCPs do not assess vaccination status. Integrating electronic health record (EHR) system functionality throughout the patient journey can assist with this effort and improve vaccine uptake.⁵

- You can be trained to administer multiple vaccines to appropriate patients who are due for multiple vaccinations⁴²
- Prior to patient visits, you can review the vaccination record for each patient and flag charts of those who are due or overdue for vaccination(s)⁴²
- You can ensure vaccines are ordered in a timely manner and are consistently available⁴²

Catch-up vaccination

Reduced vaccination rates during the pandemic make it more important than ever to assess the vaccination status of all children and adolescents at each patient visit in order to avoid missed opportunities for vaccination and ensure timely vaccine catch-up.⁴⁸

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Tips for more impactful conversation⁴⁹

- Use a health equity lens when framing information about health disparities
- Consider key health communications principles, such as using person-first language (eg, “a person with diabetes” instead of “a diabetic”) and avoiding unintentional blaming
- Use preferred terms for select population groups and communities while recognizing that there isn’t always agreement on these terms
- Consider how communications, messages, and products are developed while looking for ways to improve health equity and inclusivity

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Avoid missed opportunities^{5,42}

- Nurses can help implement systems to ensure the practice never misses an opportunity to vaccinate
- You can establish a policy to vaccinate at appropriate visits, not just well-care visits, and schedule the next vaccination appointment before the patient leaves



Implement standing orders^{5,50}

- Standing orders have had positive effects on vaccination coverage among children, adolescents, and adults



Run immunization rate reports^{5,41}

- Determine the percentage of your patients who are up-to-date on immunizations, and benchmark these data annually against state- or nation-wide data from the National Immunization Survey



Educate staff^{5,42}

- Anyone responsible for administering vaccinations should be knowledgeable about vaccination principles, scheduling, safety and effectiveness, and proper administration techniques

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ACIP, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices

APIC, Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology

CDC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

COPD, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019

EHR, electronic health record

HCP, health care provider

IIS, immunization information system

NP, nurse practitioner

SDOH, social determinants of health

UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund

US, United States

VPD, vaccine-preventable disease

WHO, World Health Organization

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