



IDSA



**Pediatric Infectious
Diseases Society**

September 9, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

On behalf of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) and the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS) we write to offer our thanks and feedback regarding the policy issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on August 19, 2020, to authorize state-licensed pharmacists to order and administer vaccines for children. Given the steep decline in children receiving recommended vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic, we support this approach at this time as part of an emergency response. However, we emphasize that every effort must be made to connect children with their primary care pediatricians for comprehensive care as soon as possible.

The dramatic decrease in childhood vaccination rates this year is a grave cause for concern and must be addressed immediately, particularly as many children are returning to school. Failure to boost immunization rates will leave our communities vulnerable to outbreaks of serious vaccine preventable diseases, including measles, further straining our healthcare system and putting lives at risk. Deploying pharmacists—with appropriate training, as outlined by the HHS policy—may be a helpful strategy.

Families should also be encouraged to visit their children's pediatrician, and we appreciate that the HHS policy would require pharmacists to counsel families on the importance of regular pediatric care. We also appreciate that the HHS policy requires the use of state immunization information systems, which will help ensure that pediatricians can follow the vaccination records of their patients, wherever they are immunized. Primary care providers, including pediatricians, have put important safety precautions in place to minimize any risk of COVID-19 transmission during health care delivery. Importantly, pediatricians offer not only critical immunizations, but also comprehensive care which includes developmental and mental health screenings, anticipatory guidance, and complete physical examinations.

Lastly, we encourage you to ensure that pharmacists offering vaccines are taking evidence-based measures to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission, including use of appropriate personal protective equipment and masks as well as procedures for distancing patients and their families.

We thank you for your ongoing leadership during this public health emergency, and particularly for your important efforts to increase childhood immunization rates.

Sincerely,



Thomas M. File, Jr., MD, MSc
President, IDSA



Kristina Bryant, MD
President, PIDS