

Millions of kids are skipping vaccines this year, study finds

24 November 2020, by Nara Schoenberg, Chicago Tribune



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Millions of American children are skipping vaccines that protect against potentially deadly or disabling illnesses due to concerns about COVID-19, according to a new Blue Cross Blue Shield Association analysis of millions of medical claims.

Children are on track to miss an estimated 9 million [vaccine](#) doses in 2020, a decrease of 26% for measles compared with 2019, and a decrease of 16% for polio, according to the analysis.

That leaves an estimated 88% vaccination rate for measles, less than the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention herd immunity requirement of 93%.

"The U.S. is on the precipice of a severe immunization crisis among [children](#)," said Dr. Vincent Nelson, chief medical officer at BCBSA, in a news release. "The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly interrupted adherence to vaccination schedules, and the possibility that [preventable diseases](#), like polio, could become a threat to public health once again is particularly concerning."

Before a vaccine was introduced, polio disabled 35,000 Americans a year, according to the CDC.

BCBSA estimated the 2020 vaccination rate for polio at 89%, down 16% from 2019. The CDC herd immunity requirement for [polio](#) is 86%. The estimated vaccination rate for whooping cough was approximately 80%, while the CDC herd immunity requirement is 92%.

The decline in vaccination rates that BCBSA found is very plausible, according to Dr. Tina Q. Tan, a professor of pediatrics at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Tan said the problem may actually be worse than the BCBSA figures indicate.

"This is something that is incredibly important to do," Tan said of vaccinations. "I realize that we are in the middle of a pandemic, but [health care facilities](#) have really gone out of their way to ensure that patients are seen safely."

The BCBSA findings are consistent with a May report from the Centers for Disease Control that found a steep drop in the number of childhood vaccinations in March and April, particularly among children older than 2. In May, the Illinois chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a statement saying an estimated 70% to 80% of children were not seeing their pediatricians due to COVID-19 concerns, and urging parents to continue routine care and vaccinations.

For the analysis, BCBSA compared member claims data from January to September 2020 with data from the same time period in 2019.

Among the findings: 40% of parents and guardians said their children missed vaccinations during the pandemic. Most vaccination postponements occurred in the spring, when the pandemic was rapidly growing, or in August, when parents passed on back-to-school vaccinations.

"These trends must be reversed," Nelson said. "It is critical that parents and caretakers keep up with regular wellness visits and catch up on any previously missed vaccinations to keep children safe and ensure community protection against these highly contagious diseases."

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APA citation: Millions of kids are skipping vaccines this year, study finds (2020, November 24) retrieved 20 November 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-11-millions-kids-vaccines-year.html>

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