

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Pediatric Visits and Childhood Immunizations in Pennsylvania

September 2020

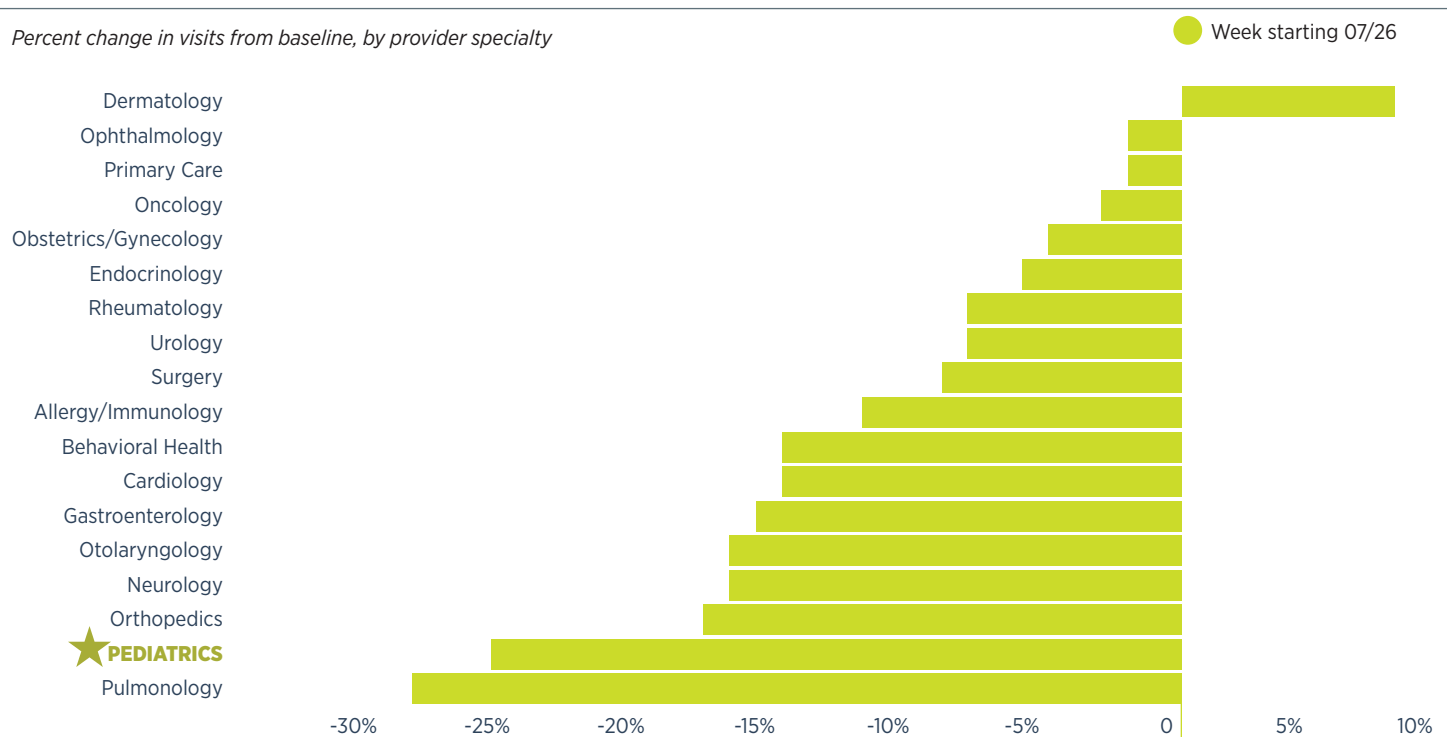
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children and the PA Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics have teamed up to educate the public and policymakers about the importance of keeping kids connected to care during COVID-19.



Decline in Pediatric Visits During COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, shelter-in-place orders were issued across Pennsylvania. With schools and child care centers closing to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus, many parents understandably kept their children at home, and even stopped going to pediatric offices. This was not unique to Pennsylvania, as pediatric office visits went significantly down across the country. In fact, visits to pediatric offices experienced some of the greatest declines relative to other specialties and remains substantially below baseline.

Percent change in visits from baseline, by provider specialty



Source: Ateev Mehrotra et al., *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Outpatient Visits: Changing Patterns of Care in the Newest COVID-19 Hot Spots* (Commonwealth Fund, Aug. 2020). <https://doi.org/10.26099/yaqe-q550>

Fewer Childhood Vaccines Given During COVID-19

The decline in pediatric office visits has corresponded with a similar drop in childhood vaccination rates in Pennsylvania, particularly for children over age one.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, vaccine ordering and administration was most heavily impacted during April and May. While vaccinations have slowly increased over the summer, there is still a significant drop off from prior years, with enormous impacts on young children and adolescents.

As of June 2020, vaccinations in Pennsylvania have declined the following percentages when compared to prior years:

- **0-11 months: 14.4%**
- **1-3 years: 47.3%**
- **4-6 years: 76.3%**
- **7-10 years: 68.5%**
- **11-18 years: 72.3%**

Source: PA Department of Health, PA SIIIS data does not capture all providers or immunizations in the state.

There are 14 vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, polio and whooping cough. Infectious diseases in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic would be dangerous. Parents can act now to call their pediatrician and ensure their child is up to date on routine vaccinations!

Keeping Children Connected to Care During COVID-19

Following the guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pediatric offices have implemented mitigation efforts to reduce risk of transmission and safely care for children, even during the public health emergency. Some of the added safety measures include separate sick and well visits, eliminating waiting rooms, universal masking, enhanced disinfecting between visits, and telehealth appointments.

The AAP's *#CallYourPediatrician* campaign reminds parents and families that pediatric offices are safe and to schedule their child's appointment today! While well-child visits may have been deferred by families at the beginning of the pandemic, the AAP strongly encourages

all children to maintain routine pediatric appointments to keep them safe and healthy.

Importance of In-Person, Well-Child Visits

- ✓ **Healthy weight and nutrition**
- ✓ **Track developmental milestones**
- ✓ **Mental health screenings and social-emotional development**
- ✓ **Routine vaccinations against childhood diseases**
- ✓ **Positive parenting support**

Maintaining preventive health care is especially important as children are going back into their communities, regardless of whether they are in the classroom or learning from home.

No Health Insurance? Medicaid and CHIP Can Help!

Many Pennsylvanians have lost their jobs and their health insurance because of COVID-19. Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) are **open for enrollment 365 days of the year.**

Sign your child up for free or low-cost health insurance today and get the peace of mind of knowing they're covered.

Medicaid 1-866-550-4355 or [online](#)

CHIP 1-800-986-KIDS (5437) or [online](#)



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