



The Honorable Jared Polis  
Colorado State Capitol  
200 East Colfax Ave.  
Denver, CO 80203

Oct. 25, 2021

Dear Governor Polis,

We are writing today because we believe Colorado has an urgent need to prioritize vaccinations for children of color as vaccines intended for 5-year-olds through 11-year-olds become available. Colorado has learned a lot about challenges, barriers and solutions to the question of equitable distribution of COVID vaccines over the last two years and we would urge you to redouble your efforts to ensure that the challenges and barriers we saw during the initial vaccine rollout as well as the roll out of vaccines to youth ages 17 to 12 aren't present for our younger children.

We are writing on behalf of the Colorado Vaccine Equity Taskforce, which is dedicated to ensuring that all Coloradans have equal access to life-saving vaccines. The taskforce is committed to supporting efforts to vaccinate as many individuals as possible, and we are keenly aware that the rate of vaccination in BIPOC communities is behind those of White communities. What we know is that while 68 percent of White Coloradans over 18 have had at least their first COVID-19 shot, this is true for only 58 percent of Black Coloradans and 41 percent of Latino Coloradans.

Our taskforce members continue to work diligently to improve access to and increase the rate of vaccinations in communities of color across the state. Many of our members are directly engaged with on-the-ground efforts that have already connected thousands of their neighbors and other community members to the protection of COVID-19 vaccination. Even with these efforts, as well as the work your administration has done around equity, our communities – often the hardest hit by COVID-19 infections and deaths – also suffer from the lowest vaccination rates.

These challenges are further complicated by the fact that children in our communities are also falling farther behind on their routine childhood vaccinations. Colorado as a whole has suffered from low routine childhood vaccination rates. Communities of color, again, have historically lower rates than White communities, often because our communities lack connections to the health care system and the ability to pay out of pocket for services. In the most recent data released by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, we see Colorado's rates have fallen even lower and far below the rates needed to protect against outbreaks of exceptionally contagious viruses like measles. According to the

data released, Colorado kids ages 0 to 17 all experienced a decline in vaccination rates, though the greatest dip happened for kids ages 3 to 17. Our youngest up to 2 years old saw a decrease of nearly 10 percent in vaccinations for measles, mumps and rubella vaccines. This reality was mirrored across the age bands with kids from 3 to 9 years of age seeing a 16 percent drop in these most routine, but critical, vaccinations. These numbers reflect stark realities for our communities, because all historic data points to the fact that children of color are always less likely than their White peers to have access to these routine vaccines.

It is with these understandings and in this spirit that we offer suggestions to help improve the equitable distribution and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines for children ages 5 to 11.

The Colorado Vaccine Equity Taskforce recommends consideration of the following actions by state agencies and individuals to ensure an equitable rollout in this new phase of vaccination:

1. Consider a review of school-based health programs and school nurse programs to ensure that these vital programs are fully funded. School nurses play a critical roll in providing important health information to families and closely monitor the vaccination rates of children in schools. Ensuring that these individuals and programs have the proper funding to continue to partner with local public health agencies and other organizations to offer vaccinations, including the COVID-19 vaccine, will be critical to ensuring equitable access.
2. Ensure that primary care providers in BIPOC communities have reliable access to and accurate information about the COVID-19 vaccine and can offer it to their pediatric patients free of charge.
3. Enact a policy that would allow pharmacists to administer COVID-19 vaccinations to eligible children, with guardrails in place to ensure that the child has or can be connected to a medical home.
4. Support online communications that promote scientifically accurate and legally appropriate information to parents and children about the COVID-19 vaccine.
5. Encourage and support whole family access to both routine and COVID-19 vaccinations.
6. Continue the use of mobile clinics and pop-up clinics in BIPOC communities and ensure that the strategies that have been successful at vaccinating individuals with the COVID-19 vaccine are implemented for other routine vaccinations.
7. Consider a policy that would align the medical age of consent to the behavioral health age of consent in Colorado statute.
8. Encourage the sharing of all vaccine demographic data between departments (CDE and CDPHE for example) not just COVID-19 data, to ensure accurate information is widely available. This will allow for more targeted approaches for vaccination efforts in BIPOC communities and other

communities in which vaccination rates lag as well as allow more robust tracking and intervention should disease outbreaks occur.

Gov. Polis, we have worked hard to ensure that we are doing our part to keep our communities safe through vaccination. While we know there is much more work to do, we also know that we have learned a great deal over the last two years about the barriers we need to remove and the efforts we need to undertake to ensure that all Coloradans have access to life-saving and life-enhancing vaccines. If there was ever a time to employ all that we know, it is now, on behalf of the youngest and most vulnerable among us.

We stand ready to work with you to support the implementation of our recommendations as well as other initiatives currently underway across the state. We firmly believe that in partnership there is great power. And our communities need this extra effort now.

Respectfully,

The Colorado Vaccine Equity Taskforce

Website: [Colorado Vaccine Equity Taskforce](#)