

Tennessee Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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Tennessee Pediatricians Encourage Families to Keep Child Wellness Visits and Normal Vaccinations

The Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (TNAAP) is strongly encouraging families during the COVID-19 pandemic to contact their doctor's office for newborn, child and adolescent medical and behavioral health care for appointments for urgent, preventive, chronic, and specialty care issues.

Tennessee pediatricians have utilized rapid innovations to adjust their clinical procedures since February, so that **patient visits can be conducted safely at the doctor's office, through online telemedicine video or phone visits from the family's home, or by combination.** The State of Tennessee considers well child visits and vaccinations essential services.

The Tennessee Immunization Program and pediatricians across the country have seen a significant decrease in child health visits and vaccinations in the last two months and are concerned that delaying vital preventive or illness care may create problems for kids in the short and long term. While many non-essential patient procedures, surgeries, and visits were postponed in the early stages of the pandemic, public health officials made those decisions to preserve personal protective equipment for health care professionals and to keep children and families safe.

Tennessee clinics and medical systems responded quickly to the public health crisis and have new protocols in place to keep well visits and sick visits separate, additional sanitizing, screening, and masking practices, and other new policies to take care of their patients and themselves during office appointments. For example,

many practices only allow patients to enter the building when their room is ready or may see patients and deliver vaccinations to them in their cars. Some offices are doing well care in the morning and sick care in the afternoon. Some are even utilizing different rooms or buildings depending on the type of care required. Clinicians can also determine during a telemedicine visit if an in-person visit is needed based on each child's and family's individual situation. It is best to discuss options with your child's pediatrician.

COVID-19 symptoms in children are generally much less severe than adults. Data from the American Academy of Pediatrics shows that children represent 3.2% of all confirmed COVID-19 cases where reporting on age is available. While the relative danger to children from COVID-19 is currently small, the risk for kids who miss their routine medical visits and vaccinations could have a greater effect. "Getting vaccines is important to protect your child from preventable illnesses," says pediatrician Dr. Anna Morad, MD, FAAP, President "Even with social distancing, there are still preventable diseases that can put your baby or child's health at risk. Call your child's pediatrician about scheduling an appointment to get them caught up on vaccines or well child care if they have fallen behind."

Tennessee clinicians are widely reporting that telemedicine has been embraced by families and adolescents and its use for behavioral health visits has dramatically increased in the last two months. In addition to maintaining important well child checkups and vaccine schedules for children five and younger, parents are also encouraged to use telemedicine appointments with their child's primary care medical home to discuss new illnesses; issues such as allergies, asthma, and sleep concerns; or general questions. Through video chats, teenagers can privately connect with clinicians to discuss mental health concerns like anxiety, depression, or substance use.

Health experts caution parents about following nonmedical advice during this time, such as purposefully exposing their child to the virus or ingesting unproven chemicals and medications to prevent or treat COVID-19. Parents looking for medically sound information or tips for talking to kids about this global public health pandemic can contact their pediatrician, go to the American Academy of Pediatrics' parenting website healthychildren.org, or get COVID-19 updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Primary Care is the backbone of children's health, so during these challenging times it is especially important to be available for Tennessee's children and families. We remind families that, as always, clinics and health providers all over Tennessee are doing everything they can to keep their patients safe and offices clean. We urge families to stay connected to their child's doctor.

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The Tennessee Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics represents the voice of more than 1,000 Tennessee Pediatricians who are dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information visit www.tnaap.org.