

Pennsylvania Children's Access to Routine and Essential Shots (PA CARES) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Version 2 - February 17, 2026

Provider Eligibility/Enrollment:

Q: Will all VFC providers automatically be enrolled in PA CARES? If not, how will we know how to apply?

A: No, Vaccines for Children (VFC) providers will not be automatically enrolled in the PA CARES program. To enroll, providers must complete, sign, and submit the PA CARES Provider Agreement to the PA CARES resource account RA-DHPACARES@pa.gov.

Q: Which providers are eligible to enroll in PA CARES (All VFC Providers, Birthing Centers, SHCs)?

A: All VFC providers in good standing with VFC program requirements are eligible to and encouraged to enroll in PA CARES. Providers who are not currently enrolled in VFC may do so through the normal process and then may subsequently elect to enroll in PA CARES.

Q: Will PA CARES directly affect State Health Centers (SHC)

A: Every SHC under the Bureau of Community Health Systems (BCHS) will be enrolled in the PA CARES program.

Q: For Pediatric Offices under a health system umbrella, does each office need to register for the PA CARES?

A: Each clinic with a distinct VFC Provider Identification Number (PIN) will need to enroll in PA CARES. Please also include your health system umbrella name in your provider's name on your agreement. For example, health system ABC Pediatrics.

Q: If we see only school aged children, will this impact us, and should we register?

A: We encourage all VFC providers to enroll. If in the future, vaccines are removed from or schedules are altered for the VFC program, we anticipate that PA CARES will cover the vaccine(s), depending on availability of funding. If the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) immunization schedule changes, PA CARES will offer impacted vaccines in accordance with the [immunization schedules endorsed by the Pennsylvania Department of Health \(PA DOH\)](#): American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). addition to those recommended by ACIP/CDC.

Q: Will PA CARES enrollment be completed through PIERS?

A: No. Providers will receive the PA CARES Provider Agreement through emailed provider notice. Providers will complete, sign, and submit the Provider Agreement to the PA CARES resource account email RA-DHPACARES@pa.gov. Please include site name and VFC PIN in the email subject line. (Philadelphia VFC providers will email their completed agreement to the Philadelphia Immunization Program at Vaccines@phila.gov.)

Q: Will enrollment information come to VFC coordinators AND back-ups?

A: Yes, enrollment information will be sent to both the Primary and Back-up Coordinators.

Q: What is the enrollment start date for this, and can you provide the link to enroll?

A: Enrollment is now open. The Pennsylvania Immunization Program has sent out an emailed provider notice with an attached PA CARES Provider Agreement to enroll on January 6, 2026.

Q: Who needs to sign the PA agreement? Can one physician sign the agreement for each office within their organization? Understanding that each office will need to submit separate agreements.

A: The provider agreement can be signed by anyone they feel has signature authority at the practice. Please ensure approval for signing on behalf of the site prior to submission as resubmitting after the process is started or completed will create more work for multiple employees and delays in the process for your site and others.

Q: What if the person who initially signed the agreement is no longer employed at the practice?

A: As long as the person had authority to sign when they did, the agreement is still fine, even if they have subsequently left. The practice does not need to complete another agreement.

Q: How long is the application good for? Will provider offices need to reenroll yearly like VFC?

A: The PA CARES agreement is effective for 10 years, unless it is terminated earlier. The agreement will not have to be re-executed until that 10 year term ends. Providers will still need to reenroll yearly for the VFC Program as they normally would. Even if the employee who signed the agreement is no longer employed, a new application is not needed.

Q: Can the application be written or must it be typed?

A: The application must be typed. The signature field can be electronically signed, or /s/ can be used before the typed name.

Q: Can we use abbreviations on our provider agreement?

A: Please refrain from abbreviations as much as possible. For naming assistance, you can use what is in PIERS.

Disenrollment:

Q: Can a provider opt to disenroll from PA CARES?

A: Yes, just like VFC, a provider is allowed to disenroll from PA CARES at any time. If a provider was to disenroll from VFC, they would also be disenrolled from PA CARES.

Ordering:

Q: Will we be able to order single doses of the vaccines from PA CARES vs ordering entire boxes.

A: Vaccine quantities for PA CARES will closely match VFC but will typically be multi-dose vials. Available products will be denoted in PIERS on the ordering screen.

Q: Will PA CARES only supplement what ACIP changes? Meaning, we will still need VFC and private stock as this does not replace VFC?

A: Yes, PA CARES will supplement the VFC program. Providers who serve private, VFC-eligible, and PA CARES-eligible patients will need to maintain a stock of privately purchased, VFC, and PA CARES stock.

Q: Will the only PA CARES vaccines that will be available for providers to order, be those that are no longer recommended by ACIP? Will all the other vaccine have to be ordered through VFC?

A: At this time, we are only enrolling providers into PA CARES. Vaccine ordering will only be made available upon changes made to the VFC program as a result of ACIP recommendations.

Q: Can we order the vaccine in the same order as our VFC through PIERS?

A: Orders with different funding need to be separated. This means you would have an order for PA CARES (once vaccine is available) and another order for VFC vaccine.

Shipments:

Q: When do you anticipate that this program will start to ship? Will there be gaps in access?

A: Our first priority is to enroll VFC providers in good standing into the PA CARES program while we work with the vaccine distributor to ensure the process for vaccine ordering and delivery is implemented.

ACIP Changes:

Q: Once a vaccine is removed or changed by ACIP, how long will it take for DOH recommendations to be released?

A: [PA DOH already released immunization guidance](#) and endorsed the vaccine recommendations and schedules produced by trusted U.S. professional medical societies, including AAP, AAFP, and ACOG.

Q: Currently, children attending PA licensed day cares need all ACIP recommended vaccines, how will the wording change?

A: PA DOH advises following the vaccine recommendations of trusted U.S. professional medical societies, including AAP, AAFP, and ACOG, in addition to those recommended by ACIP/CDC.

Q: When you say PA CARES is a safety net if the CDC changes things, do you know what exactly they are trying to change?

A: The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) already changed the recommendations for COVID vaccines, and CDC adopted the new recommendations for VFC. AS of January 5, 2026, HHS made the following changes: removed routine recommendations for hepatitis A and B, COVID-19, rotavirus, flu and meningococcal disease. These immunizations are still recommended for high-risk groups and/or shared clinical decision-making. Moved RSV immunization to high-risk group and still recommends it for all infants under 8 months who mother did not get vaccinated during pregnancy. Now recommends 1 dose of HPV instead of 2. All immunizations recommended by the CDC as of December 31, 2025, will continue to be fully covered by Affordable Care Act insurance plans and federal insurance programs, including Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and the Vaccines for Children

program through 2026. Additional guidance and direction from Program will be released as we find out more.

Q: Are there any legal implications for providers that administer vaccines on AAP/AAFP/ACOG schedule rather than ACIP/CDC? (in the event that ACIP alters their schedule)

A: All VFC providers must continue to administer VFC vaccine in accordance with ACIP recommendations adopted by CDC for the VFC Program. VFC providers who enroll in PA CARES will be able to offer PA CARES vaccines in accordance with the [vaccine recommendations of PA DOH](#) which are based on AAP, AAFP, and ACOG. Health care providers can use clinical judgment to recommend what they believe is best for their patients.

Q: Will a PA schedule be provided if ACIP does change recommendations?

A: AAP will be used instead if changes are made to the current ACIP schedule.

ACIP Changes/Inventory:

Q: If ACIP changes the recommendation for the birth dose, what will birthing hospitals do with the current VFC vaccine inventory at their site?

A: The Pennsylvania Immunization Program can assist VFC providers to transfer VFC doses to another VFC provider who will be able to use them. This assistance is already available to VFC providers to help reduce vaccine waste.

Q: If ACIP bans combination vaccines which include hep B vaccines, what do we do with our remaining VFC combo hep B vaccines?

A: The Pennsylvania Immunization Program anticipates that CDC would direct providers to return vaccines that are no longer recommended, similar to the handling of the previous season's COVID vaccine once the new formulations were authorized.

Q: If PA CARES supplies hep B vaccine, will VFC supply combination vaccines which contain hep B? If not, I guess only Pentacel will be supplied by VFC?

A: VFC will continue to offer all ACIP-recommended vaccines available on CDC's contract.

Q: How would we track inventory between VFC/317/Private/PA CARES in PIERS?

A: PIERS will have funding codes designated for PA CARES, VFC, 317, STATE and Private. Further details on vaccine ordering and inventory management will be forthcoming from Program.

Patient Eligibility:

Q: Which patients are eligible for PA CARES vaccines?

A: PA CARES has the same eligibility requirements as VFC.

Q: PA CARES doses are for VFC patients only correct?

A: Correct, PA CARES doses cannot be administered to patients with private or commercial insurance. PA CARES doses are for VFC-eligible patients. If VFC vaccine is available and the immunization schedule has not changed, VFC doses should be administered. If vaccines are removed from VFC or the immunization schedule changes, PA CARES doses should be administered to VFC-eligible patients in accordance with the recommendations and [schedule endorsed by PA DOH](#).

Q: Will this require a change in screening or documentation requirements?

A: VFC providers should continue to screen patients for VFC-eligibility at every immunization encounter and document both eligibility and eligibility category consistent with current procedure. PA CARES follows VFC-eligibility requirements.

Education for Providers:

Q: Will this be on the DOH website?

A: Some information regarding PA CARES can be found on the VFC website.

Q: Will it be possible to have a copy of the Intro to PA CARES presentation?

A: Yes, the presentation was sent to providers. The webinar recording will be available on PA TRAIN.

Education for Parents:

Q: What kind of messaging will be given to parents if we give vaccines against ACIP recommendation?

A: The Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Immunization Programs will continue to reference Governor Shapiro's [Executive Order 2025-02 – Protecting Pennsylvanians' Health and Freedom by Ensuring Access to Safe and Effective Vaccines](#). PA DOH has released immunization guidance to the public and endorsed the vaccine recommendations and schedules of trusted U.S. professional medical societies, including AAP, AAFP, and ACOG.

Direct your PA CARES questions to:

Pennsylvania Immunization Program: RA-DHPA.CARES@PA.GOV

Philadelphia Immunization Program: VACCINES@PHILA.GOV