Alaska Immunization Coverage Rates and Strategies for Improvement
Matthew Bobo MPH, Sarah Aho MPH, Kyong Yu
1Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Epidemiology
2Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Associate Program

Abstract
Immunizations are one of the greatest public health achievements, offering evidence-based opportunities for preventing infectious diseases. Despite the support for immunizations, Alaska lags behind the nation for immunization coverage rates.

The Alaska Immunization Program strives to improve immunization coverage rates through a variety of methods, including enhanced healthcare provider education, media campaigns, and working with community partners. Two evidence-based strategies for improvement feature prominently in efforts to improve immunization rates: AFIX and Reminder/Recall.

Introduction
The mission of the Immunization Program is to prevent and control vaccine preventable disease in Alaska. This goal is accomplished through a variety of activities, both by the Alaska Immunization Program, and by healthcare providers and partners. The Alaska Immunization Program strives to:

- Provide vaccines to healthcare providers at no charge
- Provide an immunization information system for use by healthcare providers and schools to maintain consolidated immunization records for Alaskans of all ages
- Ensure school and childcare compliance with immunization regulations
- Provide immunization education and training for healthcare providers and the general public
- Coordinate surveillance and control efforts for vaccine preventable diseases
- Support efforts to increase vaccinations for all Alaskans

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the multifaceted nature of the Alaska Immunization Program components and responsibilities.

Strategies for Improvement: AFIX
AFIX is an evidence-based intervention that is a partnership between the Alaska Immunization Program and an individual medical provider. The multi-step process takes 3-6 months to complete and incorporates 4 stages:

1. Assessment of the healthcare provider’s vaccination coverage levels and immunization practices
2. Feedback of results to the provider along with recommended quality improvement strategies to improve processes, immunization, and coverage levels
3. Incentives to recognize and reward improved performance
4. Exchange of information with providers to follow up on progress toward quality improvement in immunization services and immunization coverage levels

In 2017, the Alaska Immunization Program AFIX Coordinator conducted 34 AFIX visits with providers, including 22 combined childhood/adolescent AFIX visits, and 12 childhood only AFIX visits only.

Strategies for Improvement: Reminder / Recall
Reminder / Recall is a method of utilizing electronic health records or the statewide Immunization Information System, VacTrAK, to determine which patients need a reminder to receive an immunization. A reminder in the form of a postcard, card, email, or phone call is delivered to the patient to recall them to the provider’s office to receive their immunization.

In 2016, 40,000 reminder recall postcards (above left) were sent to adolescents statewide to encourage getting up-to-date on the adolescent vaccine triad: Tdap, Meningococcal, and HPV vaccines.

Beginning in July 2017, quarterly cards are delivered statewide to parents of children aged 6 through 24 months missing any vaccinations (above right). To date, over 21,000 cards have been delivered, with a return rate via USPS of approximately 2%.

Discussion
Immunization coverage rates for the 7-vaccine child series have increased from 2007 to 2016 (Figure 2). While Alaska remains below the Healthy People and Health Alaskans 2020 goals, Alaska is on track to reach the target of 75% coverage for Healthy Alaskans 2020.

HPV coverage for both male and female adolescents aged 13 through 17 years in Alaska are trending upwards (Figure 3). In 2016, Alaskan males had a significant increase for one or more doses of HPV.

Conclusions
Increasing coverage rates in NIS data is an encouraging trend. Coupled with increased media outreach, provider education, continued AFIX, and reminder / recall efforts, immunization coverage rates may continue to increase in Alaska. Improved coverage rates result in a decrease in vaccine-preventable diseases and healthier communities.

References
2. CDC. ChildVaxView. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/childvaxview/data-reports/7-series/index.html
3. CDC. TeenVaxView HPV. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/teenvaxview/data-series/index.html

Acknowledgements
Angela Wilson
Annie Peterson-Lewis, RN

Contact
Alaska Immunization Program Helpline
Email: immune@alaska.gov
Website: http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/Iz
Phone: 907-269.8088

Figure 1. Alaska Immunization Program components and responsibilities