



Department of Health

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Dear Colleagues:

As New York continues to see signs of spring, the early success of our COVID-19 vaccination program gives us reason to be cautiously optimistic about the months ahead. One year after the darkest days of New York's experience battling this pandemic, the work of New York State providers to vaccinate all eligible New Yorkers brings us closer and closer to defeating this virus. We are vaccinating hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers per day, administering well over one million doses per week. While much work and uncertainty remains ahead of us in our fight against COVID-19, we are making incredible progress thanks to the dedication of New York State's clinician workforce.

As we plan for what our "new normal" will look like, I would like to focus on two important examples of preventive care and chronic disease management – routine vaccinations and diabetes self-management education.

World Immunization Week, which takes place from April 24 to April 30, is an opportunity to highlight the pivotal role vaccines play in increasing human life expectancy and reducing the burden of preventable diseases. The theme of this year's campaign, "vaccines bring us closer," rings especially true this year. Not only does the COVID-19 vaccine rollout bring us closer to safely traveling and seeing our loved ones again – these incredible tools bring us closer to eliminating the human toll of a multitude of illnesses, from hepatitis A to cervical cancer. You can read more about World Immunization Week 2021 [here](#).

We were reminded of the importance of routine vaccinations just two years ago. In response to a measles outbreak in Rockland, Orange, Sullivan, and Westchester counties, the Department worked with local providers and other community partners to administer nearly 85,000 MMR vaccinations in those four counties. These efforts allowed us to maintain our nation's measles elimination status of 20 years.

As the measles outbreak of 2018 and 2019 taught us, vaccines are only successful in preventing disease if people are able and willing to take them. One of many aspects of our lives drastically impacted by COVID-19, access to in-person healthcare has been necessarily limited. As a result, we are experiencing dangerous declines in immunization rates across the country. As our work to lower COVID-19 rates continues over the coming months, we are prepared to partner with clinicians across the state to encourage all New Yorkers who have postponed any routine vaccinations to schedule an appointment to get caught up.

Over the coming months, we will need to work hard to get New Yorkers caught up on a wide range of routine and preventive care, including care for New Yorkers living with chronic health conditions like diabetes. In New York State, there are approximately 1.7 million people – or 11% of the adult population – who are living with diabetes. People with diabetes are at a higher risk for severe COVID-19, as well as other complications, such as cardiovascular

disease, neuropathy, nephropathy, retinopathy, Alzheimer's disease, and depression. However, complications are less common among people whose diabetes is well controlled.

Diabetes Self-Management Education: One of the most important things providers can do to empower their patients with the ability to control their diabetes is providing access to diabetes self-management education and support (DSMES). [Diabetes self-management education and support](#) empowers individuals living with diabetes with information, resources, and skills necessary for successful diabetes self-care.¹ Provided by a diabetes educator, DSMES is tailored to meet the needs, goals, and lifestyles of the individual. Evidence shows that engagement in DSMES can help significantly reduce A1C levels and lower risk for complications.^{2,3} DSMES also can help patients improve nutrition and physical activity, and can lead to lower hospital admissions and readmissions, as well as higher rates of medication adherence, among other benefits.^{1,3}

While DSMES has been shown to have positive effects for individuals living with diabetes, it remains a severely underutilized resource. DSMES, or diabetes self-management training (DSMT) (the public insurance benefit which provides DSMES coverage), is covered by Medicaid, Medicare, and commercial insurers, however only 3.8% of Medicaid members in New York State received the DSMT benefit in 2013.⁴ Nationwide, fewer than 5% of Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes and 6.8% of privately insured individuals with diabetes have used DSMES services.⁵

Clinicians like you play a critical role in providing access to DSMES for their patients living with diabetes. DSMES requires a referral from a physician, registered physician's assistant, registered nurse practitioner, or licensed midwife. In addition to a referral, patient participation relies largely on the strong recommendation from clinicians. A 2018 survey of 500 adults with diabetes found that healthcare professional encouragement was strongly associated with the likelihood of participation.⁶ For healthcare providers like you that work with patients living with diabetes, referring and recommending participation in DSMES can help ensure that diabetes is well controlled, minimizing the risk for complications down the road.

After the urgency of the pandemic and the all-hands-on-deck nature of our response has passed, COVID-19 will eventually become just one of many illnesses that affect our patients. The importance of our work to provide New Yorkers with ongoing preventative and routine care – such as routine vaccinations and assistance managing chronic diseases – cannot be overstated. On behalf of the New York State Department of Health, thank you for all of the work you do to protect New Yorkers against any and all threats to health.

Sincerely,



Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner of Health

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/learnmorefeelbetter/programs/diabetes.htm>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738399115301166>

³ <https://www.professional.diabetes.org/diabetes-self-management-education>

⁴ [Quality Connection; NYSDOH, June 2015.](#)

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/dsmes-toolkit/index.html>

⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29882990/>