

# NMDOH News Brief

# IMMUNIZATION



NM Department of Health Immunization Program

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## It's not too late to vaccinate against Flu

Andrea Romero  
Immunization Program Manager

National Influenza Vaccination Week was observed December 2-6, 2024. This is a reminder for everyone that there's still time to get a flu vaccine this season. Vaccination is particularly important for people who are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications, including pregnant people and young children. A flu vaccine is the only vaccine that protects against flu and has been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization, and death.

New Mexico was in the minimal activity level in November



**Vaccinate Against Flu**  
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## NMIC 22nd Annual Meeting and Celebration

On November 15, the New Mexico Immunization Coalition (NMIC) held its 22nd annual meeting, with 120 people in attendance! We had an excellent lineup of speakers, gave awards to eight immunization champions, had an expert panel with Q & A, and enjoyed being together in person for networking and camaraderie.

The keynote speakers were Heather Simpson and Lydia Greene, two former anti-vaccine mothers who now are pro-vaccine. Heather and Lydia shared their personal stories

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The Mobile Vaccine Team took fun pics with scary virus props at the NMIC annual meeting photo booth. See the photo gallery on page 7 for more photos.

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# AIM leadership Conference

Vanessa Hansel  
Vaccine and Outreach Manager

The Association of Immunization Managers, AIM, held an exciting Leadership in Action Conference in New Orleans, LA, that allowed for managers and other Immunization program staff to collaborate and network with various jurisdictions about their programs and best practices. There were amazing plenaries about healthy and positive work environments and breakout sessions surrounding adult vaccinations. The food, culture and company made the conference a success. New Orleans did not disappoint!

Immunization Program staff in attendance at the conference: Vaccine and Outreach Manager, Vanessa Hansel; Compliance Coordinator, Scarlett Swanson; QI/QA Epidemiologist Veronica Llamas; Perinatal Hepatitis B and Adolescent Vaccine Coordinator, Brandy Jones; and CDC Public Health Advisor, Edward Wake.



## Immunization Program *Staffing announcements*

**Chelsea Nembot**  
Public Health Associate

Chelsea recently joined us from Maryland as our new public health associate for the Immunization Program at NMDOH. She is a recent graduate from George Washington University where she studied Public Health. Since graduating from the university, she has been involved with nonprofits that focus on global maternal and community health. As a newly minted public health professional, she is thrilled to explore a new field in public health and looks forward to gaining much knowledge about immunization work in New Mexico. Outside of public health, Chelsea enjoys reading, long walks, traveling, and learning new languages.



Welcome to the team, Chelsea!

The three-day conference was held December 10-13 with a full agenda that included breakout session options that provided a plethora of information on a variety of topics, and networking opportunities as well. Vanessa presented on Thursday for Increasing Vaccine Access Through Specialty Providers.



# NMIC Immunization Champions

Each year since 2002, the NMIC has been privileged to honor excellence in immunization by publicly recognizing the hard work and dedication of those helping New Mexico achieve high immunization rates. Award certificates were bestowed at the NMIC Annual Meeting on November 15 (see accompanying article on page 1).

Here are the NMIC Immunization Champions being honored for their work in 2023.

**Belen Public Health Office** is an immunization Champion for achieving excellent vaccination rates in partnership with the Belen Public Schools and the community. Staff helped the Belen Public Schools attain 95%+ immunization compliance rate for students. The Belen PHO staff are true Champions!

**Valerie Dueñas, RN** is an Immunization Champion for her service to the Las Cruces community, her excellence in promoting and giving vaccinations, and as an invaluable resource to the Southeast Region. She takes the lead on immunization promotion; ensures vaccine orders provide adequate supply and minimal waste. She is dedicated to ensuring optimal vaccination workflow in her clinic.

**Adela Holguin, RN** is an Immunization Champion as an invaluable health leader for her community and surrounding areas, a rural community advocate, and for adhering to vaccine best practices. She trains Chaparral Public Health Office staff to address vaccine hesitancy, and helps other VFC providers with storage and handling.

**Melissa Mason, MD** is an Immunization Champion for her extraordinary leadership to increase COVID vaccination rates in the youngest age group through an innovative vaccine project,

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## Vaccinate Against Flu

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but now has increased to moderate levels in December. The 2024-2025 trivalent flu vaccines are formulated to protect against three flu viruses: (H1N1) virus, (H3N2) virus, and (B/Victoria) virus.

With most insurances, flu vaccine is covered at no cost for children and adults. For uninsured/underinsured adults, please contact a local [public health office](#) for an appointment for a free vaccine or call 1-833-SWNURSE for assistance.

### Who can get vaccinated?

Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every season with rare exceptions. Vaccination is particularly important for people who are at higher risk of serious complications from influenza.

### Who is at higher risk from Flu?

- People 65 years and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease)
- Pregnant people
- Children younger than 5 years, but especially those younger than 2 years old.

### Can pregnant people get the flu vaccine?

- The flu shot is the best protection for you – and your baby.
- Several studies conducted by CDC and partners support the safety of the flu vaccine for pregnant people
- Pregnant people should not get nasal spray flu vaccine.

### Will I get the flu if I receive a flu vaccine?

Flu vaccines cannot cause flu illness. Flu vaccines given with a needle (i.e., flu shots) are made with either inactivated (killed) viruses, or with only a single protein from an influenza virus. The

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## NMIC Annual Meeting

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of how they changed their minds about vaccines, the powerful pull of online communities, and the isolation and confusion that new mothers can experience in making decisions about their child's health. They offered concrete advice to providers on how to really listen to new parents, how to support them, and how to offer good, scientifically sound information. Heather and Lydia wrote a parent booklet: "Vaccine Fears Overturned by Facts" that is free on their website: [Our Booklet](#) | [Back to the Vax](#)

NMIC gave out Immunization champion awards to 6 individuals

and 2 organizations for their hard work in 2023 (see accompanying story on page 3). One more award was presented from the national Association of Immunization Managers to Daisy Maldonado. Daisy also presented on her organization, Empowerment Congress's amazing work down in the southern part of NM.

After lunch, the group had the opportunity to ask questions of local experts: Amy Bachyrycz, Lance Chilton, Melissa Martinez, Melissa Mason, and Andrea Romero. The panelists gave an update on hot topics, and then opened the floor for questions.

The afternoon's sessions were

some of the Better Together projects including Keres Community Health, the Black Chamber of Commerce, the Santa Fe Boys and Girls Club and the NM Pharmacists Association Foundation. All these extraordinary projects have created new, culturally aware, and innovative ways to address vaccine promotion in different populations around NM.

We are grateful for the ongoing support and dedication of the NMIC members. We would not still be here without your involvement and commitment. Thanks to all who attended and to all who shared their expertise.

## Vaccinate Against Flu

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nasal spray vaccine contains live viruses that are attenuated (weakened) so that they will not cause illness.

### **It's too late in the season to get a flu vaccine, right?**

If you have not been vaccinated, it can still be protective to get vaccinated in December or later. Flu is unpredictable and seasons can vary. Seasonal flu disease usually peaks between December and March most years, but disease can occur as late as May.

### **Who SHOULD NOT get a flu shot?**

- Children younger than 6 months of age are too young to get a flu shot.
- People with severe, life-threatening allergies to any ingredient in a flu vaccine (other than egg proteins) should not get that vaccine. This might include gelatin, antibiotics, or other ingredients.

- People who have had a severe allergic reaction to a dose of influenza vaccine should not get that flu vaccine again and might not be able to receive other influenza vaccines. If you have had a severe allergic reaction to an influenza vaccine in the past, it is important to talk with your health care provider to help determine whether vaccination is appropriate for you.

### **Resources**

[Who Needs a Flu Vaccine](#) | Influenza (Flu) | CDC

2024 NIVW Digital [Media Toolkit](#) | Flu Resource Center | CDC

[Don't Wait Vaccinate](#) – NMHealth

NMDOH Viral Respiratory Infection [Dashboard](#)

Weekly US Influenza [Surveillance Report](#): Key Updates for Week 49, ending December 7, 2024 | FluView | CDC

### Immunization Champions

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KiCK-IT (Kick COVID in Kids Interim Team). A grant was awarded by the American Academy of Pediatrics to promote COVID vaccine in children. Activities included Billboards, an ad in NM Kids Magazine, a Rubber Duckie Campaign in birthing hospitals, a webinar, and two podcasts.

**Susan Molina, RN** is an Immunization Champion for her excellence in partnering with Carlsbad and Artesia school districts to increase vaccination rates and her dedication to provide and promote vaccine access. She has forged solid relationships with the two school districts, working closely with school nurses to hold immunization clinics.

**NMDOH Mobile Vaccine Team** is an Immunization Champion for their efforts to provide adult COVID and flu vaccinations to rural and hard-to-reach populations. The team travels around the state to immunize rural folks who may not have easy access to a clinic or pharmacy and has become a trusted resource by local groups and community members.

**Shelly Ogle-Schwent, MSN, RN** is an Immunization Champion for her leadership as a change agent for vaccine hesitancy as a nurse at the Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS). Shelly brings a vast knowledge of vaccines. She organized COVID and flu school vaccination clinics and provided backup to the VFC program at SFPS. Shelly addresses parent vaccine hesitancy and supports school nurses with ways to communicate to parents.

**Anna Rutins** is an Immunization Champion for her innovative project “Chair Care—Where Beauty Meets Health” that trained hair stylists to talk to clients about COVID and flu vaccines. The stylists serve as trusted sources for immunization information based on their long-term relationships with customers. The project supplied brochures, stickers and t-shirts to publicize Chair Care.



The annual Head To Toe Conference for school health and behavioral health professionals was

held in Albuquerque on November 12-14.

Veronica Llamas presented an update on the Annual School Survey pertaining to Kindergarten and 7th Grader vaccine coverage, and the importance of childhood vaccines in school-aged children to increase protection and decrease potential for spreading of diseases and illnesses.

Immunization Program staff also tabled at the event and provided information about the Public Portal for vaccine record access [vax view \(https://vaxview.doh.nm.gov/\)](https://vaxview.doh.nm.gov/), cancer prevention vaccines and initiatives (Human Papillomavirus), and materials surrounding Respiratory season. Many attendees inquired about becoming approved adult and children vaccine providers and had questions about the upcoming disenrollments.

### Vaccine Advisory Group

The annual meeting of the “VAG” (Vaccine Advisory Group) was held on November 20. This group is tasked with reviewing the current NM School and Child Care Immunization Requirements and making recommendations to the NMDOH Department of Health Secretary for any edits or additions. The VAG is composed of representatives from the NMDOH Immunization Program, the Public Education Department, Early Childhood and Day Care, School Nursing, Epidemiology, and other Immunization experts.

The updated NM School and Child Care Immunization Requirements will be available in the new year, once they are approved by the Department of Health Secretary. Changes are expected to be minimal, with no new additional vaccine requirements.

# Mobile Vaccine Team

The mobile vaccine team has been busy on the road for respiratory season providing both the flu and COVID vaccine. The mobile team provides vaccine to the underserved populations in the state which includes uninsured/underinsured adults and populations that don't have an immediate access to a pharmacy or provider. During the season they have assisted with vaccinating farm workers as well as at soup kitchens to assist the homeless needing protection from flu and COVID. They have also assisted public health offices with vaccine catch up efforts in the community for children who need to be brought up to date on their vaccine record.

Photos, clockwise from top: Tucumcari Middle School, October 11; Tularosa Library, October 20; NAACP Carlsbad; Clovis Senior Center, October 2; DeBaca Family Medicine, September 26; Large group photo, November 13; Acoma Pueblo, October 18; La Mesa, November 12.



# Photo Gallery

During the NMIC Annual Meeting on November 15, the 2023 Vaccine Champions were honored, a variety of speakers presented, and there were opportunities for fun group pics at the photo booth (see page 8).





Well Child Campaign is live! The [landing page](#) provides reminders to keep children healthy and up to date on vaccines and to prevent disenrollments from school. Scheduling a well-child visit is a great way to support children's health and measure their milestones while making sure they're up to date on vaccinations. Additional resources are listed on the page for parents such as Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) Services, Turquoise Care Medicaid (includes the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, and more.



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