This certainly has been a different and scary time. COVID-19 has taken over our world in a way that few would have predicted. The clear message given mid-March for people to stay home was taken to heart by almost everyone except those whose jobs are considered essential. And by staying home, slowly but surely, New Mexicans have helped to flatten the curve and prevent our health care system from getting overloaded. This is a very good thing.

Instructing everyone to stay at home as much as possible and to postpone all but emergency or essential activities, resulted in many parents being told that well-child visits were on hold and would be rescheduled later in the summer. Some parents were reluctant to bring their children to a medical facility unless they were ill. Immunization efforts in many cases ground to a halt. Many Public Health Office staff have been reassigned to coronavirus activities and have discontinued their regular vaccination clinics. Provider offices are nervous to have well children come in when sick children might also be at the office. So for at least 2½ months, many children have not been vaccinated or been seen in-person for their regular well-child checks.

Recently, the CDC published data that show a...
Erica Martinez-Lovato

Erica is retiring from state government and her position as Immunization Program Manager, effective July 1, 2020. She has been an effective, dedicated and well-liked manager who will be greatly missed. Erica came to DOH from the Human Services Department in January, 2015 and quickly learned all about NMSIIS, the statewide immunization registry, that stores all immunization records as well as vaccine inventory. She led the implementation of a new registry software in 2016, smoothly bringing the program into the 21st century. She implemented Reminder-Recall, an evidence-based way to improve coverage. Erica led the transition to digital data loggers from thermometers to keep vaccines viable at the right temps. She took listening trips to Regions statewide and implemented the Immunization Newsletter to connect stakeholders. She has built a strong management team that will carry this important program into the coming years.

Erica will be greatly missed. Her competence, get-it-done attitude, and her lack of fear when confronting difficult challenges have left New Mexico with a strong program. She continues working on a new grant proposal right until her last day on June 18.

We wish her well and look forward to hearing how she decides to contribute in new ways in coming years. Take care and many thanks, Erica.

*Katie Cruz, NMSIIS Staff Manager*

Edward Wake

Edward Wake is our new CDC Public Health Advisor assigned to the NMDOH Immunization Program.

Edward comes to New Mexico via the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). His previous CDC assignment was with the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s Bureau of Immunization, where he served as a Public Health Advisor and worked as the Bureau’s Adult Immunization Unit Chief. Previous to his assignment in NYC, Edward worked for the California Department of Public Health as the Vaccines for Children program regional supervisor in Los Angeles County. Before that, he served as the vaccine manager for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health’s Immunization Program.

Edward is happy to work with public health professionals who are dedicated to reducing and eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases among the people of New Mexico.
large drop in routine vaccines across the country. It is concerning that many children may be insufficiently protected against our routine childhood diseases—the last thing we need on top of a pandemic is an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease like measles or whooping cough. In addition, if children who are not vaccinated become sick, it is more difficult to know whether it’s a cough from pertussis or coronavirus. Is it a bad headache from meningitis or from coronavirus? Is it pneumonia from pneumococcus or coronavirus? The efforts to keep children safe by keeping them at home have inadvertently allowed them in some cases to miss critical doses of vaccine.

Now we are facing a new phase of the pandemic in which we are cautiously starting to re-open, to come back to work, and to resume our “normal” activities—although with some modifications and new rules. This is also a different and scary time. What if we see a new surge of cases? What if people don’t follow the rules of physical distancing and wearing face masks? Am I safe to venture out of my house?

The guidance from CDC and AAP indicates that providers should make every effort to continue to immunize, see insert below.

Providers should create time and space that separate well visits from sick visits. Some providers are utilizing morning appointments for well child checks and immunizations and afternoons for sick visits; some are utilizing one office for well visits and another for sick visits. In addition, provider offices may have patients wait in their cars for their appointments in order to maintain physical distancing for those who have to wait. All providers are paying close attention to sanitize between patients and to screen patients for symptoms before they come in.

Working together to get the message out about the importance of vaccines, the importance of keeping children up to date and as protected as we can, needs to be as clear and present as the message of wearing a face mask in public and maintaining physical distancing. We know that vaccines work, that they are safe and that they save lives. Together let’s keep our children and communities as safe as possible by not allowing these vaccine-preventable diseases to come back.

1 https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6919e2.htm?s_cid=mm6919e2_w
Annual Provider Awards
Award winners recognized for their immunizing excellence

Over 80% Childhood Vaccination Rates
BCA Medical Associates, Artesia
BCA Medical Associates, Carlsbad
Children’s Clinic, Los Alamos
Full Bloom Pediatrics, Las Cruces
* IHS Jicarilla Service Unit
* IHS Santo Domingo Health Center
IHS Zuni Community Health Center
Journey Pediatrics, Albuquerque
Lovington Medical Clinic
* Maria G. Crawley, MD, Las Cruces
NM Primary Care Group, Las Cruces
Presbyterian Rio Rancho, 528 Clinic
Presbyterian Rio Rancho Pediatrics

HPV Completion
Cañoncito Health Center
Cochiti Health Clinic
IHS Isleta Health Center
* IHS Jicarilla Service Unit
IHS Pine Hill Health Center
IHS Santa Ana Health Center
IHS Santa Fe Indian Hospital
* IHS Santo Domingo Health Center
IHS Zia Health Clinic
Las Cruces Family Medicine
* Maria G. Crawley, MD, Las Cruces
Pueblo Pintado Health Center
Reginald O Lord, MD, Albuquerque
Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Clinic, Gallup
Thoreau Health Clinic
Union Medical, Roswell
* Both Childhood and HPV award winners

Got Shots in the time of COVID-19

Got Shots?
In a normal year, many children are in need of vaccines in order to register for school. This year, even more children will need to catch up on vaccines that were postponed during the spring.

NMIC, the NM Primary Care Association and NM Department of Health are collaborating with our MCO partners—BCBS of NM, Presbyterian Health Care and Western Sky Community Care—again this summer to help kids get vaccinated before school starts. Got Shots is scheduled for July 25-August 15.

Got Shots is an annual effort where providers sign up for set times to open their doors for no-appointment, no-cost vaccines to any child ages 0-18 who needs vaccines, regardless of their insurance status or whether they are patient at that clinic. Getting an appointment in late summer can be challenging for parents; “Got Shots” helps parents by offering walk-in clinics just for vaccines.

This year, shot events may be organized slightly differently, including possibly:

• Ask parents and children over two to wear face masks
• Have patients wait in their cars and not in the waiting room
• Bring paperwork to patients in their cars
• Use hand sanitizer or wash hands before entering the exam room

Providers can access the registration form on the NMIC website. Starting in July, parents can visit the website to see which providers in their county are participating in Got Shots.