



FAQs

Immunizations for Children and Youth in Foster Care: What Social Workers Need to Know

CFSA requires children in foster care under 18 years of age to get regularly scheduled immunizations. Social workers need to work with resource parents and birth parents to ensure that they occur on schedule. These Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) outline some key practice requirements around immunizations.



Now that CFSA is immunizing children at the Healthy Horizons Assessment Center (HHAC), should I just bring all the children on my caseload to the HHAC to get their immunizations?

No. The Healthy Horizons immunizations are just for children who are behind schedule, or have no immunization record. It is best for children in care to get immunized by their own doctors, so it is critical for you to know who the primary care physician is.

How will I know whether a child on my caseload is behind on her immunizations?

The HHAC or the Nurse Care Manager (NCM) will identify the children who are behind on their immunizations, and they will coordinate with you to plan next steps for the child's immunizations.

Does HHAC need the consent of the birth parent in order to immunize a child?

Yes. Only the birth parent or the Family Court (via court order) can consent to allow a child to be immunized. It is important for you to engage the birth parent about the importance of getting the child immunized, and to encourage the birth parent to sign the [CFSA consent form](#).

Am I, as the child's social worker, expected to obtain the parent's consent to immunize her?

Yes. After a home removal occurs, encourage the birth parent to attend the child's 30-day comprehensive assessment at the HHAC and obtain the consent then. Clinic staff will be on hand to answer any potential questions. Otherwise, good opportunities to obtain consents would be the Family Team Meeting (FTM), the initial court hearing, a home visit, or an ice-breaker event.

I've obtained the birth parent's signature on the consent form, so now what do I do with it?

Be sure to bring it with you to the child's 30-day comprehensive assessment at the HHAC. The signed form goes in the child's case record, and a copy goes in the placement packet for the resource parent.

Can the resource parent still bring children to their doctor to get immunized?

Yes, but only when the birth parent has consented to it. Let resource parents know that they themselves cannot sign any consents for immunization. If the child's primary care physician does not already have a signed parental consent form on file, then the resource parent should bring the one in the placement packet. When there are issues, please take lead with the NCM or the HHAC staff to resolve the issue, and

keep birth parents and resource parents apprised of the situation. There is another [FAQ document](#) with guidance on the issue for resource parents.

Should I be confirming that immunization consents are in place for every child on my caseload?

Yes. As children in foster care come upon their scheduled immunizations, make sure that consent forms are on record with the HHAC or with the child's primary care physician, and work with birth parents to obtain them if they are not. You may encounter resource parents who, in the past, actually signed the consent. In such cases, let them know that they've done nothing wrong, but at the same time remind them not to do so anymore.

If the birth parent has concerns or refuses to consent to immunizing the child, what then?

If parents need more information on why it's important to immunize, put them in touch with the nurses at the HHAC. If the parent refuses outright, then usually you should talk with the AAG about obtaining a court order to allow the child to be immunized on schedule. But, if the parent objects to immunizations on religious grounds or for medical reasons, it's likely the child won't be immunized. The [AI on Immunizations](#) has more information.

Can the child be enrolled in school or in day care if she's not immunized?

If the child isn't immunized because the parent refused for religious or medical reasons, most school systems have opt-out procedures that will allow the child to attend school. The school is the best source of information on this issue. Be sure to link the resource parent with the CFSA educational specialist in the Office of Well Being's Administration for Clinical, Educational, and Family Services (ACEFS) to navigate this process.

At what age can youth consent for themselves?

Youth who are 18 years of age or older may consent to receive immunizations.

Where can I find more information about immunizations?

The American Academy of Pediatrics Immunization information page has helpful resources, tip sheets, newsletters and resources for parents and caretakers: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/immunizations/Pages/Immunizations-home.aspx>

If you have questions about **immunizations in general**, then send an email to CFSA's Health Services Administration at cfsa.healthservices@dc.gov.

If you have questions about **consent specifically**, then email CFSA's General Counsel at cfsa.ogc@dc.gov or call (202) 727-2646.