

Preparation

Create your partnership

There may be several individuals and organizations that can assist you in the design, plan and implementation (or putting into action), and evaluation of your environment or policy initiative. Immunization related environments and policies interventions have been implemented with the assistance of a wide range of partners.

Example partners to implement your immunization initiative with include:

- community coalitions
- head start/early childhood workers
- urban league
- community agencies
- local library
- parents
- veterans administration medical center
- university – faculty and students
- national health service
- state and local health department
- schools
- hospitals
- faith based organizations
- health centers/clinics
- private practices
- vaccine manufacturer
- private businesses/worksites
- pharmacies
- insurance companies
- transportation systems
- local media

Try to think of partners that can serve a variety of roles. For example, you may need certain partners to help you create a plan for an environmental change to promote immunizations (e.g. schools, local businesses) while some partners may be more helpful in implementing a policy (e.g., physicians, nurses).

Besides creating an environment or policy initiative to increase immunization rates, it is also important to evaluate your efforts. There may be elaborate and expensive ways to develop and implement an immunization environment and policy intervention. Regardless of the complexity of your intervention, to evaluate an immunization related environment or policy initiative, it is often useful to seek out technical assistance from local colleges, universities or others with this experience.

For more information on engaging partners, go to [Partnerships](#).

Identify your population

Typically immunization related environments and policies interventions have targeted immunization for both the general population (i.e., those who will be effected by the

intervention) and specific populations (e.g., key decision makers such as local politicians, school board members, employers, etc.) immunization related environment and policy interventions have also been created to suit the needs of various subgroups with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, age, or other sociodemographic characteristics.

As you start to consider your own population, it will be important to identify important aspects of the population you want to increase immunization rates and the organizations and individuals who will influence environments and policies related to immunization rates, such as:

- Define your population. (e.g., consider age, gender, ethnicity, etc.)
- Are there subgroups within this population?
- What are the geographic boundaries?
- What are the shared social and cultural characteristics of this community?
- Who influences environments and policies within this geographic area and for your population of interest?

For more information on identifying your population, go to [Assessment and Prioritization](#).

Environments and policy interventions have been implemented in a variety of settings including: schools, communities, health care facilities, faith-based organizations and worksites. For more information on settings for immunization-related interventions, go to [Immunizations in Different Settings](#).

Examples of environment and policy interventions to increase immunization rates that have been used in other communities include:

- *Development of immunization-related registries:* These interventions have been developed to enhance tracking and monitoring of individual immunizations and community wide immunization rates.
- *Changes in standards of care:* These changes may take the form of standing orders for nurses or other qualified personnel to determine the appropriateness of certain immunizations and administer these immunizations without obtaining permission from a physician. In addition, protocols for care can provide cues to action for physicians and other clinical personnel to check certain individuals at risk and to provide immunizations as appropriate
- *Increased access to places to obtain immunizations* – In addition to changing protocols for care there are also programs that seek to enhance access to immunizations. For example, by providing immunizations in schools, in shopping malls, at WIC program sites, in mobile vans, and even through home visiting programs.
- *Decreased cost of immunizations:* Many immunizations are costly and some may not be covered by insurance policies. One approach to increase immunization rates has been to lower these costs by incorporating the cost into existing insurance policies, and/or providing low cost or free immunizations.

Record your intervention goals and objectives

If you and your partnership have not formed your intervention goals and objectives, you will need to work with your partners to do so. Although you may refine your goals and objectives, it is important to start with some idea of what you want to accomplish for this intervention.

Example of an immunization related environments and policies intervention goal and objective:

- Goal: Increase rates of influenza immunization in your community
- Objective: Increase access points where individuals can obtain the influenza immunization by 25% in the community.

In order to develop an appropriate goal and objective for increasing immunization rates through changes to environments and policies you will need to have a good idea of the community's needs, the political climate, and community support for the policy or environmental changes. It may also be helpful to create a logic model to organize your goals, objectives and the action steps to meet your goals and objectives. Some funding sources have very specific logic models for your partnership to use, so be aware of different requirements. For more information on developing goals and objectives, visit [Preparing for Your Intervention in Readiness and Preparation](#).

Assess your community capacity and needed resources

Public health practitioners and community organizations can assist the partnership in determining what actions will be most helpful in creating environmental and policy changes. These actions may include communicating with the community as a whole or with specific decision makers. In either case it is important to provide the information about the need for environmental and policy changes in a way that will capture the intended audiences attention. This may include a public action and a large number of people, or a smaller action that involves more face to face communication. Public health practitioners and community organizations can take part in either of these types of actions in a variety of ways. For example, they can provide current, relevant information and data to help develop the messages conveyed. They can also help identify appropriate audiences for a particular message (e.g., an elected official, the public at large). Because the intent of these activities is to create broad based environmental and policy changes statement, it is often useful to organize media coverage of the event and to ensure that public officials are aware of it.

If your partnership receives public funds, many things are allowed that support initiatives that advocate for environmental and policy changes. You can provide current data or other educational information on an issue as it is experienced in your community. Likewise, your partnership can help by developing a list of legislators to contact based on their interest in the issue or their position on certain legislative committees.

These different approaches and activities may require a variety of different resources.

Example resources needed include:

- a copy machine or access to a printing facility is required to get brochures and other printed materials out to the community
- cameras, video recording devices, or audio recording devices and associated technology may be needed to document and communicate community problems
- access to billboards, bus stops, train stations or other locations to post messages
- transportation
- mobile van

An immunization related environment and policy intervention will require certain skill sets depending on the specific strategies used. For example, it may be necessary to have planning, community organizing, or public policy skills. Others have found it useful to get assistance from experts in these areas to ensure that communications related to policy or environmental changes are appropriate and that resources to assist individuals who wish to obtain immunizations are made known to community members. You may want to have your staff participate in some type of training to build capacity within your organization to collaborate with these other partners.

Likewise, evaluation of immunization related environments and policies may be complex and may require assistance from researchers and other partners who have experience with study design, measurement development, data collection, data analysis, or translation of research findings into practical implications for your community.

In general, efforts to draw attention to your environmental and policy efforts may be costly, so it will be important to develop a budget and estimate the costs of advocating for the policy and maintaining it over time.

Evidence from previous suggests that many resources and funds are required to create environments and policies.

Previous work in environments and policies has found the following:

The development and implementation of some of the enhanced access intervention strategies (e.g., providing immunizations at schools through existing school nurses) are relatively inexpensive and may be considered a good investment. However, the enforcement of policies and other changes to the environment (e.g., building a new health clinic in and providing school nurse staffing where these resources do not already exist) may be very expensive.

Space may or may not be an issue. These interventions can be conducted in neighborhoods, schools, worksites, or other environments that don't require renting out space to implement the intervention.

Likewise, equipment and materials may or may not be issues for consideration. Some of the equipment and materials are relatively inexpensive to acquire and distribute (e.g., tables and chairs) but some necessary resources (e.g., the immunizations themselves, storage facilities for immunizations) may be more costly.

Other resources to think about may include monetary or other incentives for participation among health care providers and participants.

The [Readiness and Preparation](#) and [Capacity](#) sections provide information and resources to help you think about the resources you might need for your intervention. For specific examples of tools and resources for immunizations that have been created and used by other communities, visit [Tools and Resources for Immunizations Environments and Policies](#).

Design your intervention activities

- *Create community awareness*

One way to gain community support for your policy or environmental change is to raise the awareness of community members regarding the strengths and challenges of obtaining immunizations within your community. One way to do this is to ask people who have obtained immunizations to speak to others in the community about their experiences. You can also ask people in the community to document community characteristics that need to change in order to increase immunization rates by keeping a journal, taking photographs, videotaping, or audio taping comments. This has been referred to by other groups as an audit of the environment. The documented evidence from these assessments can be used to identify and prioritize problems as well as to advocate for change (e.g., show pictures or videotapes to community members and policymakers).

When promoting a policy change, it is important to gather sound scientific evidence from a wide variety of disciplines to document the health risks of disease and the benefits of immunizations. Previous efforts have included an assessment of the health effects of immunizations; documentation of what has already been done to address the issue; the specific historical, cultural, and political context; and the economic impact of changes in the environment that could increase immunization rates (e.g., changes in standards of care and/or access to places to obtain immunizations). All of these may use quantitative (e.g., survey) or qualitative (e.g., interviews) data collection.

Once this information has been gathered, it is important to present the information back to the community and important stakeholders in a way that shows why the issue should be a concern and specify why a policy would help create a desired change.

These presentations can help to identify and prioritize problems as well as to advocate for change in a way that shows why policy and environmental changes are important for increasing immunization rates.

It is also important to consider the kinds of information, as well as the methods of sharing information, that will be most useful in getting key stakeholders involved.

Example strategies for information sharing:

- Newsletters
- community forums

- websites
- local meetings of civic and volunteer associations
- meetings with city council members or legislators

Remember that information or evidence alone may not convince key decision-makers – they may also need to see constituent support for these policy or environmental changes. Constituent support may be demonstrated by having a group of people who would be affected by the policy or environmental changes speak to what they see as the benefits of enacting such a change (e.g., increased access or changes in standards of care).

Economic feasibility is important to policy implementation, political and community support, and long-term success. Policymakers may want to know about the economic costs and benefits of the policy or environmental change, so be prepared to answer questions about the costs and benefits of various options.

In addition, while you have the attention of critical decision-makers, it is helpful to ask for advice on how to move forward a legislative or environmental and organizational strategy to address the issue. This will help to ensure time for your interactions to match the policy process and that goals of all partners are met.

- *Promoting community supports*

Think about what your community members and decision-makers want as well as what is feasible based on political and/or community support and available funding. Likewise, consider how long it may take to create these changes and whether the support from community members and decision-makers will continue as long as you will need it to. Most importantly, work with your partners to figure out what changes are reasonable and practical in the community. For example, it may not be appropriate to promote a school policy requiring all students to obtain immunizations if there are no low cost or free immunization options for students who require these options. These interventions will be more effective when characteristics of your population are taken into consideration (see [Assessment and Prioritization](#)).

Social action is an approach that can be taken to increase support for immunization related environments and policies. This approach can help to spotlight how the environment can affect people's health. Social action may include the use of confrontation or conflict.

Example use of a social action: A group of community members might join together to light a candle for each person who has died from a disease that could have been prevented through immunization. These approaches can sometimes get people's attention when other approaches have failed. Though this strategy can help to define and bring attention to a problem, it is also necessary to strive towards effective solutions. Working with your partners through social planning can assist you in moving from awareness of the concerns to acting to create changes in immunization related environments and policies.

When you feel you have adequate support, you can focus on environment and policy changes (e.g., information, availability, and access or incentives to support immunizations). Make sure that your partnership is prepared to create environment- or policy-level changes. Environmental changes require support from the site of

interest as well as those using the site (e.g., schools- superintendent, parent teacher associations, teachers, students). A policy is a plan or course of action intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and rules or regulations that govern our collective daily life. Policies can be created and enforced by organizations, schools, and workplaces or by the government at local, state, or federal levels.

Advocating for environment or policy changes is another approach communities can use to create changes in immunization related problems in their communities. Advocacy is the act of arguing in favor of or against an issue or policy. A well-structured organization can act as a public advocate to define a problem that affects many individuals or communities and can work to unite their voices and actions to create change. Larger advocacy organizations often develop regional or national strategies to address issues and then work with local organizations to obtain support to implement these strategies.

While some advocacy groups may work directly on changing access to resources (e.g., immunizations), others may work on policies that influence who can provide these immunizations. By working with both types of groups, you may have linkages to larger organizations that can help define concerns and develop potential solutions.

NOTE:

If your partnership is considering public advocacy strategies, be aware that most organizations that receive public funds cannot participate in lobbying activities. Lobbying activities include letter or phone campaigns and petition drives.

Previous immunization related environments and policies have been successful in creating changes in access to immunizations and changes in standards of care regarding when immunizations can be provided and for whom. For more information, go to [Tools and Resources for Immunizations Environments and Policies](#).

- *Create a timeline and assign roles and responsibilities*

Work with your partners to decide on the timeline for the intervention as well as who will be responsible for carrying out the intervention activities. Be very specific about roles, tasks and timelines to ensure that the intervention is implemented successfully. Include information about when your message will be distributed and by what communication channels.

Identify potential barriers

Think about the potential barriers that may be encountered along the way and prepare your reaction to these barriers.

Some of the barriers you might encounter:

- cost – develop a budget and estimate costs of creating, implementing, and enforcing the policy or environmental change;
- resources – whether your partnership has members experienced in presenting the need for new policy or environmental changes, as well as designing environments, drafting policies, or building on existing relationships with

others who can assist in these activities. A substantial amount of personnel time is required for all phases of these types of interventions, including:

- planning and preparation phases – how to get access to stakeholders to draw attention to policy and environmental change, how to build support for these changes and how to get buy-in from community members to increase access to immunizations.
- implementation and evaluation– how to find funds to support broader environmental changes (e.g., access to immunizations at local schools or through mobile vans) and how to get people to use the environments
- maintenance– how to ensure that individuals obtain multiple doses of immunizations or repeat immunizations for those that need to be repeated over time;
- political representatives and key decision makers – be persistent in trying to get the attention of policy-makers and influential community leaders. It may be important for you and your partners to get buy in from various key decision-makers – for example, representatives from pharmacies, schools, worksites, or transportation. These decision-makers may not understand the importance or want the added work of changing what is already offered or in existence. Others may feel burdened by having educational messages that put their staff in a position to have to respond to questions about **immunizations** when they may not be prepared to do so;
- relationships with settings where you want to provide immunizations: it is useful to have existing relationships with organizations, worksites, schools, faith-based organizations and other locations prior to encouraging them to provide immunization sites. This is also true for health care settings that you want to work with to either increase their provision of immunizations or to change their standing orders to allow additional personnel to evaluate the need for and provide immunizations.
- Consistency with cultural & organizational norms: It is important that any changes in environments and policies be done in ways that are consistent with and take into account the cultural norms of the populations you are working with. Similarly, different organizations and agencies have different organizational norms and structures that should be taken into account when creating environmental and policy changes to enhance immunization rates.
- Be mindful of individual barriers: While the focus of environmental and policy changes are to create community wide changes to enhance community level rates of immunization it is important to recognize that individual barriers may still influence immunization rates. These may include for example cultural and language barriers, lack of understanding of the benefits and risks associated with immunizations, and a low relative importance of immunizations. In addition, individual factors may influence acceptance and utilization of the environmental and policy changes you propose. For example, some communities may not wish to obtain immunizations at malls or at their worksites, while others may feel uncomfortable with individuals entering their homes.
- Lack of confidence in efficacy of vaccines/fear of adverse reactions: Some providers and individuals may not utilize increased access to immunizations because of concerns regarding efficacy of the vaccines or concerns regarding adverse reactions. It is important to provide accurate and up to date information so that individuals can make informed decisions and make use of increased access to immunizations as appropriate.

- Some may be unclear about the frequency of immunization or the dosing schedule: even when environmental and policy changes are made to decrease structural barriers to obtaining immunizations, individuals may not understand that they need to obtain immunizations each year (e.g., influenza) or that they require multiple doses of an immunization for it to be effective (e.g., hepatitis b). It is helpful to incorporate other types of interventions to ensure that communities have this information and make the most of the enhanced access environmental and policy changes can provide.

Barriers that have been encountered in other interventions that focus on environments and policies that may impact immunization related interventions are summarized below:

- interventions to change environments and policies may take a lot of time to get up and running.
- Increased access to locations to obtain immunizations may increase immunizations over the short term, however, these impacts may decline with time.
- Interventions that combine increased access along with changes in standards of care may make it difficult to estimate the relative contribution of each of these changes to immunization rates.
- School personnel may not view nutrition as seriously as they do other health-related behaviors and conditions.
- Some types of environmental changes may be more long lasting than others. These types of interventions have not been sufficiently evaluated to know which will have the most significant long term effect.
- Difficult to evaluate and attribute changes in immunization rates to interventions when the overall norms are changing.
- Recent regulations regarding privacy (i.e., HIPAA) may create barriers to individuals being able to obtain immunizations in certain locations and may prohibit tracking of immunizations over time.
- Some providers may be hesitant to provide immunizations to individuals outside of their usual care as it may decrease the individual's other preventive health seeking behaviors.

Plan your evaluation methods and measures

- *Consider your evaluation strategy*

In order to determine if your immunization related environments and policies interventions are working, you will need to evaluate your efforts. It is important to design your evaluation in the planning phase of your intervention because you will need to be able to measure the impact of environment and policy changes that have been made.

Work with members of the population to identify community needs and gain support from local government officials, policy-makers, community members, and other community decision-makers through participatory approaches or focus groups. Immunization related environments and policies interventions might include an assessment to examine what changes need to be made or what new policies or developments need to occur to meet the needs of the community. You can also assess health risks of obtaining a disease and the benefits of obtaining

immunizations Others have also included an assessment of the existing access to resources (e.g., immunizations) and places (e.g., medical providers, schools) where individuals can obtain immunizations. To develop an effective policy or environment initiative, the specific historical, cultural, and political contexts as well as the economic impacts of immunization -related changes are important to understand and evaluate.

As with all interventions, it is useful to consider process, impact and outcome evaluation. Process evaluation enables you to assess if your program is being implemented as intended. Environments and policies might include an assessment of how the policy was implemented and enforced. It may also be useful to assess the process used to develop and plan the environments and policies. This may include an assessment of the coalition processes (e.g., decision making, conflict management) and well as specific logistics (e.g., time of meeting, location of meeting).

Impact evaluation enables you to determine if you are achieving your intermediate objectives. For environments and policies, as with other types of interventions, it is important to assess exposure to the intervention. This can be done for example through a telephone survey to the targeted audience regarding their awareness of a new or amended environment or policy. Environment and policy surveys can be used to measure exposure factors and also to assess changes knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors (e.g., benefits of immunization, immunization rates). Alternately, it is possible to track the use of facilities (e.g., clinics, vans, special immunization centers) or immunization rates when special tools or systems are used or existing data is collected and summarized.

Remember it is important to focus the evaluation on the objectives of the intervention. If the objective was to change access by increasing the access to immunizations through mobile vans, it is important to assess access. Alternatively, if the intent was to improve enforcement of a policy related to standing orders for immunizations, then it is important to assess enforcement and factors that influence enforcement.

- *Challenges to evaluating immunization related environments and policy interventions*

There are several challenges in evaluating immunization related environments and policies that should be considered:

- It is very challenging to establish causality (e.g., changes in the cost of immunizations led to increased immunizations). Some individuals may have obtained immunizations because of pressure from family and friends. It is important to get as much information as possible about the reasons why individuals obtained immunizations.
- The exact combination of immunization related intervention strategies (environmental changes, policies, individually adapted strategies, etc) that will be best to change immunization rates is unknown.
- When immunization related environment and policy interventions are used, it is difficult to figure out which intervention strategies led to the changes that were observed in the evaluation.