

EXPANDING ACCESS: MAKING VACCINES MORE AVAILABLE TO MORE MARYLANDERS

Introduction

Vaccines save lives, prevent illness, support work, and protect against natural and man-made outbreaks of lethal disease. Yet the United States faces a major crisis in vaccine supply. The Institute of Medicine concluded in 2000 that “the public health infrastructure that supports the national vaccine infrastructure is fragile and unstable.” Since that time, our country has seen three influenza vaccine shortages, shortages of routinely recommended vaccines against 8 of 11 preventable childhood diseases, and the publication of a series of expert statements and blue ribbon reports calling for a revitalization of our vaccine effort.

Across the nation and in Maryland, many children fail to receive routinely recommended vaccinations on time. Rates of coverage for life-saving influenza and pneumococcal vaccines are unacceptably low. In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control found that Maryland ranked 46th among states in flu vaccine coverage. In 2004, Maryland ranked 43rd among states in flu vaccine coverage with fewer-than two-thirds of Maryland’s seniors receiving a flu shot.

A weak vaccine infrastructure leads to unnecessary suffering and death.

Vaccine shortages and unavailability rob children and adults of a potent weapon against serious infectious disease. Without a way for vaccines to reach those who need them, the public health potential of new lifesaving immunizations against rotavirus, adult whooping cough, cervical cancer, meningitis, and herpes zoster will be squandered.

A weak vaccine infrastructure is a vulnerability in homeland security and biodefense. A robust vaccine capacity allows for a rapid response to novel threats, whether natural or man-made.

A weak vaccine infrastructure represents a missed economic opportunity.

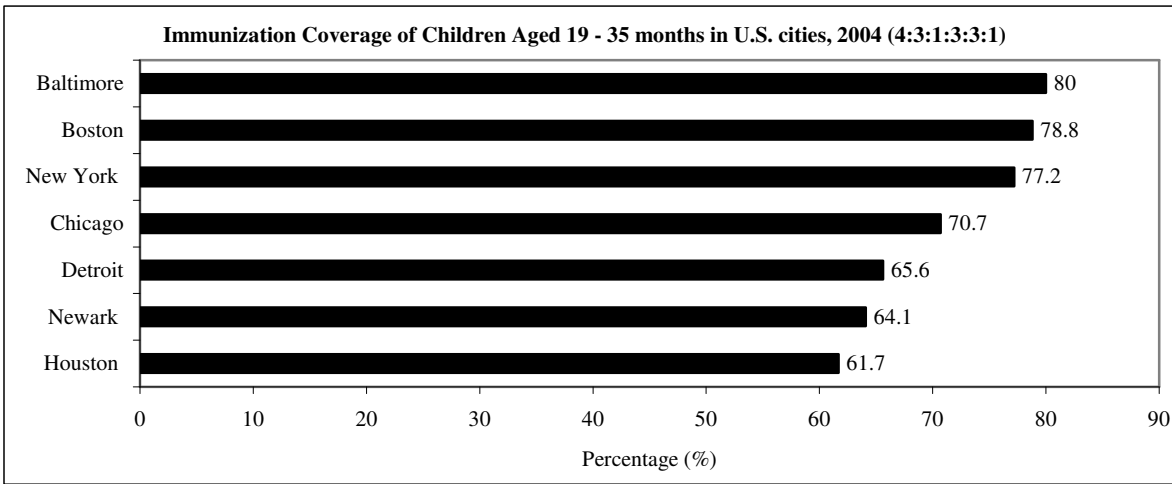
Maryland recently lost the chance to be the home for a major vaccine manufacturing facility run by the pharmaceutical company Novartis. Other states

and countries will capitalize on the vaccine market if Maryland does not.

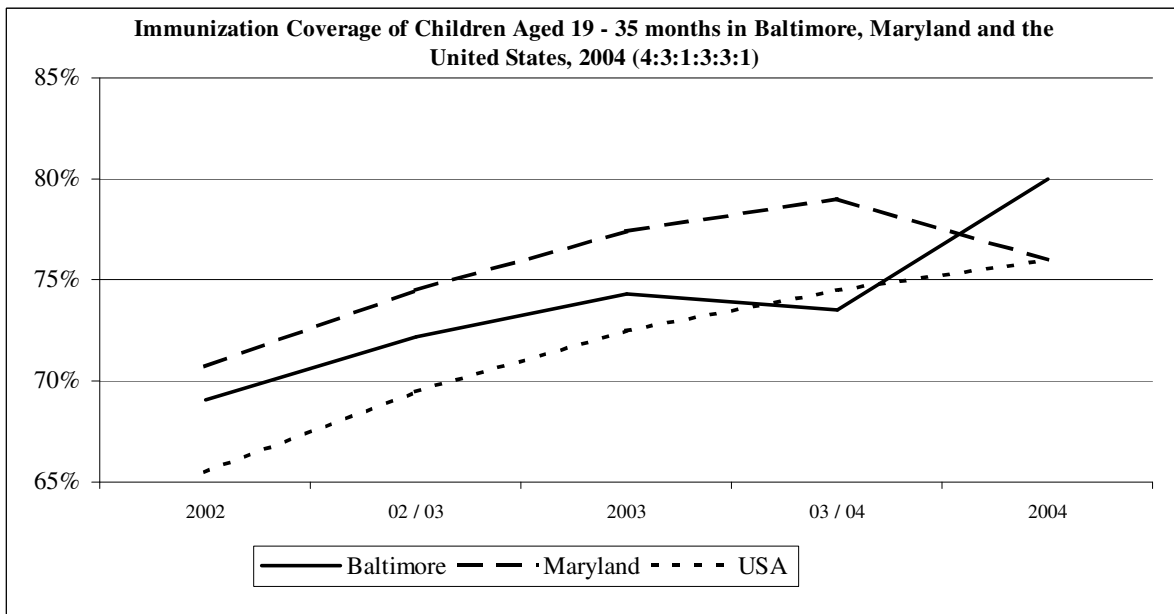
Maryland can and must do better.

Baltimore's National Recognized Leadership on Immunizations

Under the leadership of Mayor Martin O'Malley, Baltimore has made major strides in improving vaccination rates among children. Using a data-driven strategy and unprecedented community outreach, Baltimore in 2004 achieved the highest vaccination rate of all cities under surveillance by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In March 2006, CDC presented Baltimore with a "most improved" award. Baltimore's progress was the largest among honored cities.



During the O'Malley administration, the vaccination rate of toddlers in Baltimore surpassed the rate in Maryland and in the United States.



The Vaccines for Maryland Initiative

Building on their record of accomplishment, Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown have proposed the Vaccines for Maryland Initiative. Key components of this proposal include:

Initiate an Influenza Vaccine Buy-Back Program: An important factor limiting flu vaccine coverage is that private doctors must bear the cost for any unused vaccine. This system creates a strong financial incentive for doctors to order less vaccine to be sure they can use it all – or not order flu vaccine altogether.

To maximize the number of people who can receive the flu vaccine from their own doctors, the Vaccines for Maryland initiative will pilot an innovative influenza vaccine buy-back program. Under this program, at the end of the flu season, the state of Maryland will purchase a percentage of a doctor's unused doses of flu vaccine at a percentage of his or her cost. To be eligible for reimbursement, doctors will notify the state health department of what they have purchased in advance. This will allow coordination with public health officials to use all remaining vaccine.

Develop the Vaccines for Maryland Program: Building on Maryland's Vaccines for Children program, through which approximately 750 enrolled providers throughout the state provide free vaccinations to qualified children 18 years old and younger, the new Vaccines for Maryland program will ensure access for all Maryland residents to recommended and cost-effective vaccines. (See <http://www.cha.state.md.us/edcp/html/vaccine.html> for additional information regarding Maryland's Vaccines for Children program.) An expert committee with public representation will review available evidence and approve a list of vaccines for which the benefits can be reasonably expected to exceed the costs. Once the committee recommends a vaccine for a particular group or groups:

- health insurers will cover the cost and administration of the vaccine;
- the state will ensure that children can receive the vaccine, as recommended, from their own doctors; and
- the state will make grants to local health departments so that uninsured adults will be able to receive the vaccine, as recommended, under programs to be established in coordination with area physicians.

Expand Vaccine Performance Measurement Efforts: To measure the success of the Vaccines for Maryland initiative, the state will develop tools to assess rates of vaccination coverage and vaccine-preventable disease. These data will guide outreach and education efforts and inform changes to the initiative over time.

Create a Task Force on the Vaccine Industry: To further encourage the vaccine market and capitalize on Maryland's emerging biotechnology industry, the Vaccines for Maryland initiative will convene a high-level task force to review the business climate for biotechnology and vaccine companies. The task force will include scientists, economists, physicians, and the public. It will advise on incentives and other regulatory changes needed to recruit vaccine-related businesses to Maryland.

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