

Steps to Implementing Standing Orders for Immunization in Your Practice Setting



Standing orders are written protocols that allow qualified healthcare professionals (who are eligible to do so under state law, such as registered nurses or pharmacists) to assess the need for and administer vaccines to patients.

- Standing orders must be approved by a physician or other authorized practitioner in advance of vaccination.
- Patients must meet certain criteria, such as age or underlying medical condition.
- The qualified healthcare professionals must be eligible by state law to administer certain medications, such as epinephrine, under standing orders should a medical emergency (rare event) occur.

Why implement standing orders?

Using standing orders streamlines your practice workflow by eliminating the need to obtain an individual physician's order to vaccinate each patient. Standing orders are the most consistently effective means for increasing vaccination rates and reducing missed opportunities for vaccination.

By empowering nurses and/or other eligible staff to use standing orders, your office will

- Facilitate efficient assessment for and administration of one or more vaccines
- Improve vaccination rates in your practice, which will, in turn, protect more patients from vaccine-preventable diseases and decrease opportunities for disease transmission in your healthcare setting.

Getting started

Integrate standing orders into the practice workflow so they can be used to their full potential. This requires some preparation so everyone in the practice understands how and why standing orders are being implemented. Suggested steps follow.

Step 1 Build Support of Leadership

Discuss the benefits of implementing standing orders with the leadership (medical director, clinicians, clinic manager, lead nurses) in your medical setting. It is important to get their buy-in from the start.

Involve these people from the start:

- **Medical Director** – This person is responsible for signing the standing orders protocols or supervises the clinician who signs them, so it is critical that he/she agrees with the need for standing orders and supports their use.

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- **Clinicians** – Determine which clinician(s) authorized by applicable state laws or regulations will review and sign the standing orders protocols for the practice.
- **Providers** – Identify issues that might lead to resistance among healthcare providers who administer vaccines.
- **Nurse Leaders** – Identify potential obstacles to efficient use of standing orders; train nursing staff.
- **Legal Counsel** – Consider discussing the standing order with your office’s legal counsel to be sure the protocols comply with all applicable state requirements.

Check vaccination rates prior to leadership meetings because the need for standing orders may be evidenced by low vaccination rates. Measured vaccination rates are usually lower than perceived rates.

Step 2 Identify Who Will Lead the Standing Orders Program

- In most practices, the lead person will be a nurse, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant.
- The lead person must be an influential leader who has medical knowledge, understands the standing orders protocols, and is able to answer staff questions.
- The lead person must be motivated to protect patients by improving the vaccination levels in your practice – a true immunization champion.



Step 3 Which Vaccines?

- Reach agreement about which vaccine(s) your practice will give using standing orders.
- It may be best to start using standing orders only for one vaccine (e.g., influenza; second dose of HPV vaccine) if you have not implemented standing orders previously.
- Later, when staff are trained and are confident in the process, you can expand their use to additional vaccines.
- Standing orders work well for improving vaccination coverage for children, adolescents, and adults.

Step 4 Develop the Standing Order Protocol; Get sign-off

Don't reinvent the wheel! Immunize.org offers standing orders templates for all routinely recommended vaccines. These are available to download at no charge at www.immunize.org/standing-orders.

- Immunize.org's standing orders are developed by technical experts and are kept updated whenever a revision is needed.

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- Use Immunize.org’s standing orders templates as written, or modify them to meet your practice’s needs.
- Have the medical director or clinician responsible for the program review and sign the standing orders.

NOTE: Immunize.org also has standing orders templates available for managing vaccine reactions, which include the administration of medication. These templates are available at www.immunize.org/catg.d/p3082.pdf for adults and at www.immunize.org/catg.d/p3082a.pdf for children.

Step 5 Determine the Role Staff Members Will Play in Using Standing Orders

Here are some questions that will help you plan:

- Who is eligible under state law to assess a patient’s vaccination needs and provide vaccinations using the standing orders protocols (e.g., RNs, pharmacists, others)?
- Who in your practice will fulfill each role?
- Who will determine a patient’s need to be vaccinated?
 - Check the patient’s chart (and state immunization registry, if applicable)
 - If no electronic vaccine record, ask for hand-held record; call previous practice
- Who will assess for contraindications and precautions? A screening checklist is available at www.immunize.org/handouts/screening-vaccines.asp. Consider: Can these questions be added to your electronic health record (EHR)? Who will review the patients’ answers?



Step 6 Explain the Standing Orders Program to all Staff Members

It is crucial that all staff understand the program because they will all be involved directly or indirectly.

- To get buy-in from staff, you will need to explain why you are starting this program. (See “Why implement standing orders?” at the beginning of this handout.)
- Review how standing orders work and the specific protocols and procedures with all staff members who will be involved.

Step 7 Program Assessment

As with all quality improvement activities, it’s wise to review your standing orders program shortly after it begins, check in with staff each week until it’s running well, and then every few months until your immunization rates are at your goal or, in the case of influenza, the vaccination season has ended. Compare the number of doses of vaccine you gave before and

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after your standing orders program was put in place. Consider whether you are ready to expand your use of standing orders to additional vaccines.

See “Using Standing Orders for Administering Vaccines: What You Should Know” at www.immunize.org/catg.d/p3066.pdf.

Improving vaccination delivery: beyond standing orders

Beyond standing orders, there are other ways to maximize your office immunization rates. Here are some modifications to consider:

- **Assessment with feedback:** If feasible, track your immunization rate improvements after implementing standing orders.
- **Check immunization status:** Check the chart, check the state immunization registry (if applicable), and ask every patient who enters the office about their immunization status.
- **Staff prompts:** If you use an EHR, consider whether the standing orders protocols and screening questionnaires can be added as prompts within your existing system
- **Expand services:** Once your team is using standing orders, consider expanding services. For example, can your team:
 - Offer walk-in vaccination visits (no appointment necessary)?
 - Hold vaccination clinics on evenings or weekends?
 - Have “vaccination-only” visits?
 - Offer “express” service for vaccination during regular office hours?



Be sure all aspects of your vaccine delivery are optimal. These aspects include proper storage and handling of vaccines, vaccine administration techniques, strategies to avoid vaccine administration errors, documentation requirements for administering vaccines, and materials to help answer questions of vaccine-hesitant patients. Visit www.immunize.org/clinic for many helpful resources.



Congratulations on implementing standing orders in your practice! Both you and your patients are now benefitting from this proven method to streamline your office practice while improving your patients' quality of care.

