



Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

October 21, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

I write to you today, hopefully for the last time on this issue, to urge the prompt and urgent release of a final rule regarding COVID-19 vaccination for Head Start and Early Head Start staff.

While our community is grateful for the September 2022 announcement by the Administration for Children and Families finally aligning the masking requirement in the Head Start Interim Final Rule with Comments (IFC) with CDC guidance, the absence of a final rule on vaccines is both frustrating and extremely disruptive to our ability to effectively serve children and families, as noted in our July 29, 2022 letter to you.

The health and safety of Head Start children, families, staff, and communities continue as our top priority. Yet, over eight and a half months since it went into full effect on January 31, 2022, the IFC continues to apply only to some Head Start grant recipients—depending on the state where they are located—due to legal action by the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Louisiana on September 21, 2022. This sets a dangerous precedent for a federal program that owes its success to deep community engagement and local autonomy.

Further, the current IFC does not acknowledge or create space for the changing dynamic of COVID-19. For example, the IFC does not mention booster shots and was implemented in an environment where children under the age of five were not able to access vaccinations against COVID-19. Much has changed since the IFC was first released and we urge you to update the IFC with a final rule that is in line with this changing reality.

Again, we appreciate the Administration's work to restore the local authority around masking that is vital to Head Start programs' success and their ability to serve as many low-income children and families as possible. We implore you to do the same with regard to vaccines.

Thank you for your consideration and urgent action.

Sincerely,

Yasmina Vinci
Executive Director, National Head Start Association