

**Communications Team**

401 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 1300  
Seattle, WA 98104-1818

**206-296-4600** Fax 206-296-0166  
TTY Relay: 711

[www.kingcounty.gov/health](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health)

## Text Messaging for Vaccine Reminders

**Overview:** Investigators conducted a pilot project to learn about how to set up a texting program that could be utilized in the event of a public health emergency and to test people's willingness to participate in a texting program from Public Health. During a mass flu vaccination exercise, we asked parents of children who needed two doses of flu vaccine if they would like to receive a text message reminding them to return for a second dose of vaccine. Of parents whose children needed a second dose of vaccine, 84% opted in to the texting program in the first year of the pilot and 95% opted in during the second year.

Through the pilot project, researchers also explored issues of working with a text messaging vendor and uncovered many important legal issues related to using text messaging to communicate protected health information to the public.

**Method/Participants:** We piloted the text messaging project at two mass vaccination exercises in the fall of 2010 and 2011. Educators utilized an algorithm to assess whether children receiving the flu shot at the mass vaccination exercise needed a second dose in thirty days. Parents were then asked if they wanted to receive a text message reminder and provided their cell phone number and whether they wanted a text message in Spanish or English. Researchers utilized a third-party texting vendor to send a text message reminder to those who opted-in to the program.

**Results:** In year one of the pilot, 84% of parents whose children needed two doses of vaccine opted in to receive text messages. In year two, 95% of eligible parents opted in to the program.

**Recommendations:**

- Explore health communication gaps within your health department and how texting might fill those gaps in efficient and effective ways.
- You must get individuals' permission to send them text messages. Piggyback on other interactions with public health audiences to assess whether your particular audiences are interested in receiving text messages from Public Health and what kinds of messages they are interested in receiving.
- Start small and expand. It takes some time to learn to write brief 160 character messages, to work with texting vendors and to train staff on sending text messages using texting systems. Start with a small program and then expand once you have some experience.

