

## OHS Pauses Full Enrollment Initiative

January 2022

On January 7, 2022, OHS issued an [Update on the Full Enrollment Initiative](#) announcing that it will not resume its evaluation of programs entering the Full Enrollment Initiative in January 2022. This decision was made in light of recent surges in COVID-19 cases across the country, and it represents a change from OHS's plan to resume evaluations for full enrollment beginning in January 2022 as announced in [Program Instruction ACF-PI-HS-21-04](#) issued in May 2021.

Moving forward, OHS will instead continue to track enrollment via the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES). OHS further stressed the need for Head Start programs to continue making decisions regarding service delivery by balancing the importance of in-person services with the health and safety concerns posed by the pandemic. The letter recommends considering health guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and/or local health authorities, the needs of Head Start families, and the pandemic conditions specific to the program's community in making those decisions. Head Start programs are also encouraged to build on existing service delivery plans and work with their regional offices as they adapt in response to the pandemic.

Some concrete measures to facilitate safe in-person services recommended by OHS include encouraging staff and families to get vaccinated and continue masking indoors, as well as using American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to support staff and family vaccinations, purchase COVID-19 at-home tests, and ensure access to personal protective equipment (PPE). As a reminder, Program Instruction [ACF-IM-HS-21-05](#) encourages grantees to use ARP funds and other COVID-19 relief funding to provide incentives such as hiring bonuses, hazard pay, retention bonuses, and temporary raises to support staff retention and recruitment. OHS also suggests several strategies to reduce the risk of exposure in Head Start facilities, including test-to-stay, keeping distance, screening testing, ventilation, hand-washing, and staying home when sick.

To help Head Start programs think creatively about strategies to increase enrollment, the Office of Head Start is launching a series of webinars occurring between January and March—[Recruitment and Strategic Approaches to Enrollment](#). The series reviews expectations, highlights strategies, and explores workforce growth.

As a reminder, [OHS now requires](#) all individuals two years or older to mask in indoor settings where Head Start services are being provided, and all Head Start staff as well as certain volunteers and contractors must be fully vaccinated by January 31, 2022. This requirement is currently blocked by temporary injunctions in 25 states, but is in effect in the remaining states.

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