

# MEMO

**TO:** Prevention Partnership Providers and  
Local Public Health Units

**FROM:** Darcey Tysver, RN  
Vaccines for Children Coordinator

**RE:** Dormitory-Style Refrigerators

**DATE:** January 7, 2009

***As of January 1, 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will no longer allow Vaccines for Children (VFC) or federally-supplied vaccine to be stored in dorm-style refrigerators, and these types of units will not be considered acceptable storage units for VFC or federally-supplied vaccine.***

Dorm-style refrigerators are not adequate for long-term or permanent storage of vaccine because they do not maintain proper temperatures and pose a high risk of freezing vaccine. As of **January 1, 2010**, the only acceptable use of dorm-style refrigerators will be to store a clinic's single-day supply of refrigerated (never frozen) vaccine, and these vaccines must be returned to the main refrigerator storage unit **at the end of each day**. Temperatures must still be monitored and recorded twice daily for any dorm-style refrigerators used for storing single-day supplies of vaccine. These logs must be submitted to the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) monthly with the main storage unit's logs. As a reminder, the freezer compartment of a dorm-style refrigerator is never acceptable for storing frozen vaccine for any period of time. Please see the enclosed Q & A document on dorm-style refrigerators.

***Providers currently using dorm-style refrigerators for permanent VFC or federally-supplied vaccine storage will need to have acceptable storage units in use by January 1, 2010, in order to be compliant with the requirements of the VFC Program.***

Please feel free to contact the NDDoH Immunization Program with any questions or concerns at 701.328.3386 or toll-free at 800.472.2180.

Enc.  
cc: Dr. Craig Lambrecht, Medical Director  
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## VFC Storage and Handling Q&A

### What type of storage equipment does the VFC program require enrolled providers to have to keep VFC vaccine in their practices?

VFC providers must have appropriate equipment that can store and assist with maintenance of proper conditions of vaccines.

Vaccine storage units must be selected carefully and used properly. If a provider does not have the appropriate storage units, the grantee must work with the provider to obtain storage units that are acceptable.

Refrigerators without freezers, and stand-alone freezers, may be better at maintaining the required temperatures. However, a combination refrigerator/freezer unit sold for home use is acceptable for vaccine storage if the refrigerator and freezer compartments each have a separate external door.

Refrigerators or freezers used for vaccine storage must comply with the following requirements:

- Be able to maintain required vaccine storage temperatures year-round;
- Be large enough to hold the year's largest inventory;
- At a minimum, have a working certified thermometer inside each storage compartment. Grantees may require VFC providers to have a calibrated certified thermometer inside each storage compartment. Calibration must be traceable to standards provided by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) (a U.S. Government agency within the Commerce Department) or a laboratory recognized by NIST. Calibration can be traceable to NIST using American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) methods for the calibration process;
- Be dedicated to the storage of vaccines. (Food and beverages must not be stored in a vaccine storage unit because this practice results in frequent opening of the door and destabilization of the temperature.)

Reference: VFC Operations Guide - Module 6 pages 8-9, VFC Questions and Answers Document

### Are "Dorm Style" refrigerators acceptable storage units for VFC vaccines?

Dormitory-style refrigerators should only be used to store a clinic's single-day supply of **refrigerated** vaccines and these vaccines should be returned to the main refrigerator storage unit at the end of each clinic day. Dormitory-style refrigerators are not adequate for long-term or permanent storage of biological products because they do not maintain appropriate temperatures.

Storage of VFC vaccine in refrigerators that are designed for use in small household spaces such as dorm rooms **are never acceptable for permanent storage** of VFC vaccines. Permanent storage is defined as the vaccine supply is maintained in the unit 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

"Dorm Style" refrigerators are acceptable for short-term storage of select VFC vaccines under **very limited conditions** which are listed below:

1. The purpose of using these units is for temporary storage when it is not reasonable for the staff administering the vaccine to go to the main storage unit to obtain vaccine for each and every patient.
2. **The unit is never used for storing Varicella-containing vaccines**
3. Only small amounts of inactivated vaccines can be maintained in these units. The amount of inactivated vaccines stored in the unit must never exceed the amount used in the clinic in one day.
4. The vaccine is returned to the main storage unit at the end of each clinic business day and vaccine is never stored in these units overnight or during periods of time when the practice is not open for business.
5. Each unit has a dedicated certified thermometer in place.
6. **Temperatures are monitored and documented twice a day on temperature log specifically for that unit.** Appropriate action is immediately taken when the temperatures are outside the appropriate range.
7. These units must be included and examined during the VFC compliance visit and corrective actions taken and documented by the grantee if any of the above conditions are not met.

**Some of our providers have small compact storage units that were designed to hold medical biologicals. Are these storage units acceptable for permanent storage of VFC vaccine?**

Yes, these types of vaccine storage units are acceptable if they meet the following conditions:

1. The refrigerator and freezer compartments each have a separate external door, or
2. Units are stand-alone refrigerators and freezers  
Refrigerators or freezers used for vaccine storage must comply with the following requirements:
  - o Be able to maintain required vaccine storage temperatures year-round;
  - o Be large enough to hold the year's largest inventory;
  - o At a minimum, have a working certified thermometer inside each storage compartment. Grantees may require VFC providers to have a calibrated certified thermometer inside each storage compartment. Calibration must be traceable to standards provided by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) (a U.S. Government agency within the Commerce Department) or a laboratory recognized by NIST. Calibration can be traceable to NIST using American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) methods for the calibration process;
  - o Be dedicated to the storage of vaccines. (Food and beverages must not be stored in a vaccine storage unit because this practice results in frequent opening of the door and destabilization of the temperature.)

Reference: VFC Operations Guide - Module 6 pages 8-9, VFC Questions and Answers Document

**How does CDC define a dorm-style refrigerator?**

A dorm-style refrigerator is a small combination refrigerator/freezer unit that is outfitted with one external door, an evaporator plate (cooling coil) which is usually located inside an ice-maker compartment (freezer) within the refrigerator, and is void of a temperature alarm device. Its temperature control sensor reacts to the temperature of the evaporator rather than the general air in the storage compartment. When the compressor is on, the evaporator cools to lower the temperature in the refrigerator, in most cases to below 0°C.

The problem with dorm-style refrigerators is that they place vaccine at a high risk of freezing.

Ideally, vaccine storage units should be temperature-monitored/alarm-equipped stand-alone refrigerators and stand-alone freezers. These units, unlike the dorm-style units, will have an evaporator that is located behind the surface of the walls, the back of the refrigerator compartment or, in most cases in the back of the unit.

**What type of guidance can be given to a VFC enrolled provider who is using small refrigerator that falls into CDC's definition of a dorm-style refrigerator that has maintained the appropriate temperature according the provider's log and the field staff's thermometer regarding why the office must replace the unit?**

The field staff should educate the provider that while this unit has performed well, these types of units are not reliably maintain temperatures needed to keep vaccine safely within the required ranges to prevent unintentional loss of vaccine because it was stored at inappropriate temperatures. CDC has never recommended that these small dorm-type refrigerators be used as permanent storage units for VFC vaccine. In 2008-2009, CDC is requiring all VFC programs to work with their enrolled VFC providers to eliminate the use of dorm-style refrigerators as permanent storage units for VFC vaccine. Grantees must plan to have all dorm-style refrigerators phased-out of currently enrolled VFC-provider offices by December 31, 2009. Grantees must work with providers that have these units so the transition to acceptable VFC vaccine storage units will be completed by December 31, 2009. Effective immediately, all newly enrolling VFC providers cannot use a dorm-style refrigerator as a permanent storage unit for VFC vaccine, please refer to VFC Operations Guide Module 6 pages 8-12 for further information on VFC program vaccine management requirements. One of the main reasons that CDC is taking this action is due to the rising cost of VFC vaccine. As VFC vaccine cost approaches \$3 billion, it is essential for the integrity and continuation of the VFC program to ensure that VFC vaccine is stored in appropriate units which decrease the chance of vaccine loss due to

inappropriate storage conditions. When possible, the field staff should share with provider the monetary amount that the VFC vaccine represents in that specific practice to further illustrate the need to store and manage the vaccine appropriately.