

American Academy of Pediatrics

Extended Office Hours

Extending the hours of operation can help alleviate unnecessary patient visits to the local Emergency Department (EDs), as well as the use of retail-based clinics (RBCs) for minor medical issues. In addition, offering extended hours can assist in retaining current patients as well as attracting new ones.

Consider the following six key questions when deciding if the pediatric practice should offer extended office hours:

1. Understanding the Patient Population – Is there a patient need for extended office hours? Are the later afternoon appointment slots (i.e. after school hours) filled well in advance?
2. Understanding the Marketplace – What are local competitor's offering? Do they provide early bird, evening and/or weekend (Saturday/Sunday) hours?
3. Cost/Overhead – If operating out of a rented office space, will the building be open for patients to gain access to the practice? If not, will the building allow and charge an additional fee for extending the hours of availability?
4. Breaking Even – How many patients would need to be seen to at break-even?
5. Marketing – How would extended hours be marketed (e.g. social media, print, office signage, on-hold messaging, etc)? What will be the cost associated with advertising?
6. Adequate Staffing – Are there enough providers and support staff to facilitate the additional hours, or would a shift in staff schedules or extra support be required? If more staff are required, how many would be needed and how much would it cost?

Staff should be given clear guidelines on scheduling during extended hours. Factors to consider include:

- What method will be used to schedule patients (eg clustering, wave, modified wave, etc).
- Will new patients be seen during extended hours, or just established patients?
- Will some appointment slots be left open to ensure same-day access?

Extending the office hours not only has the potential for increasing satisfaction among patients and families, office team and physicians, but can also improve practice revenue.