

2015 School Law Update – Frequently Asked Questions

What does the new law change? Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap) vaccine will now be required for students starting at 7th grade. In previous years, only a Td, or tetanus/diphtheria, shot was required. The new law adds the pertussis component. Students currently in grades 8th-12th who have not yet received their Tdap vaccine will also need to be caught up.

Students in kindergarten through 12th grade will need to have two doses of varicella (chickenpox) vaccine. Students attending a preschool or prekindergarten will need one dose of varicella.

When will the new law go into effect? The 2015 Montana Legislature has revised school immunization requirements for school attendance **effective October 1, 2015.**

Why the change to the law? Prior to the passage of this law, Montana was the only state that did not require the varicella series and one of five not requiring a pertussis booster for school attendance.

Varicella, also known as chickenpox, is a highly communicable disease. It causes an itchy rash and can lead to common complications like scarring, bacterial infections and pneumonia. Less common, but more severe complications can include inflammation of the brain, and death. Severe disease can be prevented with vaccination.

While pertussis may be a milder disease in older children, teenagers and adults, to the very young, pertussis has proven to be deadly. As we age our immunity to pertussis wanes, leaving teenagers and adults susceptible to infection, exposing infants and young children to pertussis.

Vaccination protects not only the person being vaccinated but others who may not be able to receive a shot because of age, allergies or illness.

Have the exemptions to immunization been changed? No, exemption provisions have not changed. Religious and medical exemptions are allowed.

My child is a senior this year. Are the varicella and Tdap still a requirement? Yes, the new law includes students of all ages. In order to prevent outbreaks in school, all students are required to either be vaccinated or show proof of immunity.

If my child had chickenpox does he/she still need to be vaccinated? In lieu of receiving the varicella vaccine a student or parent can use any of the following evidence of immunity to varicella:

- Laboratory evidence of immunity or laboratory confirmation of disease
- Diagnosis or verification of a history of varicella disease (chickenpox) or herpes zoster (shingles) by a healthcare provider (MD, DO, NP, PA)

What about prior history of pertussis? Since the duration of immunity as a result of pertussis is not clearly established, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice (ACIP) do not encourage the use of history of illness as an exemption for pertussis vaccination. Montana's rules will be consistent with this recommendation.

Do we know how many students already have these vaccines? The 2013 National Immunization Survey (NIS) estimates that:

- 84% of Montana teens 13-17 years old have received their Tdap vaccine.
- 82% of Montana adolescents aged 13-17 years have already received one dose of varicella vaccine and 58.6% of teens are already in compliance with two doses.
- 87% of children 19-35 months of age have received a single dose of varicella vaccine.

Where can I take my child for shots? Call your child's healthcare provider or your local county health department to make an appointment.

Will insurance cover the cost of the vaccines? Yes, most health plans must cover certain preventative services for children at no cost. Immunizations are covered under this requirement. Some health plans are still exempt from this requirement so it is always a good idea to check with your health plan before receiving these services.

I don't have health insurance or my plan doesn't cover the shots. Can I receive assistance in getting my child immunized? Yes, the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program supplies vaccines at no cost for eligible children through VFC-enrolled healthcare providers and health departments. To find a VFC provider in your area [click here](#).

Which children are eligible? Your child is eligible if it is before his or her 19th birthday, and if he or she is one of the following:

- Medicaid recipient
- Uninsured
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Underinsured – FQHC/RHC/Health Department clinics can serve VFC Underinsured

What is meant by underinsured? Underinsured means your child has health insurance, but it won't cover the vaccine(s) because

- It doesn't cover any vaccine.
- It doesn't cover certain vaccines.
- It covers vaccines, but it has a fixed dollar limit for vaccines. Once that fixed dollar amount has been reached, your child is eligible.