

Immunization Requirements for School Entry: Assisting Parents/Guardians

Brief Overview

The enforcement of the West Virginia vaccination requirements is an easy way to assure the health and active attendance of all students through compliance of the vaccination rules. W.Va. Code §16-3-4, WVDHHR Legislative Rule 64CSR95 and WV Board of Education Policies 2423-Communicable Disease Control, 2525-PreK and 4110-Attendance requires immunizations for all new enterers including PreK, new enterers in grades K-12, extracurricular activities and grades 7 and 12 starting this school year. West Virginia immunization laws allow for medical exemptions only which means religious and philosophical exemptions are not recognized as valid exemptions for school entry.

All students must have at least one dose of each vaccine required by law in order to provisionally enter public schools. The provisional enrollment is temporary until the next recommended dose(s) is able to be administered by a medical provider, as indicated by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) dosage timeframes. Should the vaccination(s) not be completed during the provisional enrollment period, please note the parent has not met the school enrollment requirements for the student to continue a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). West Virginia currently has precedent setting case law which supports state immunization laws (*Workman vs. Mingo County BOE*). Ensuring immunization requirements for student enrollments are met is a simple way for schools to enhance the health and learning conditions for all students and school personnel. Current immunization documents and rules are posted at <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/oeps/immunization/requirements/Pages/default.aspx>.

Recommendations

As county boards of education and schools work to educate and inform parents regarding the public health immunization requirements for school entry, the local health department must be a key partner. Schools must ensure parents/guardians are provided with the following notifications:

- Verbal and written information regarding the needed vaccination(s) for school enrollment;
- Verbal and written information regarding provisional enrollment;
- If the student attends a Universal PreK setting, the parent/guardian is required to develop a plan for completion of their child's vaccinations;
- During the provisional enrollment or grace period, the school should send written request for proof of the required vaccination(s) to the home while informing parents/guardians that immunizations are required for continued enrollment into West Virginia Public Schools unless a medical exemption approved by the local health officer is presented for school records;
- After the provisional enrollment or grace period has ended and the school has exhausted assistance, information, notification and other avenues of support in collaboration with the local health department, an official certified letter should be sent to the parent/guardian informing them of their ineligibility to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Sufficient time should be provided to allow parents/guardians to find safe child care services during this transition out of public schools.
- In cases where parents refuse to comply with immunization requirements due to religious or philosophical reasons, assistance with information regarding the ability to home-school should be provided to the parent/guardian. Homebound services are not an option in these cases. Private and parochial schools are also bound to the immunization law requirements.

The immunization laws in West Virginia lead the nation in health promotion and disease prevention. As you watch the national news or research vaccine preventable disease outbreaks like pertussis (whooping cough), varicella (chickenpox), measles and mumps, please know schools have done their job to ensure the health and wellness of West Virginia students.