

## **IMMUNIZATION POLICY**

Exemptions from the Texas Department of State Health Minimum Vaccine Requirements will only be allowed for medical contraindications. To claim exclusion for medical reasons the parent or legal guardian is required to present a statement or letter, written and signed by the child's physician.\* The letter must state, in the physician's opinion, the vaccine required is medically contraindicated or poses a significant risk to the health and well-being of the child or any member of the child's immediate household. The statement/letter will be valid for one year from the date signed by the physician unless it is written in the statement that a lifelong condition exists.

Provisional admittance will be allowed for students whose vaccine series are not up to date. To remain enrolled, the student must complete the required subsequent doses in each vaccine series on schedule and as rapidly as medically feasible and provide written documentation of evidence of vaccination to the school nurse. A school nurse shall review the immunization status of the provisionally enrolled student every 30 days to ensure continued compliance in completing the required doses of the vaccines. If at the end of this 30-day period a student has not received a subsequent dose of the vaccines, the student is not in compliance and the school will exclude the student from attendance until the required doses are administered.

Any student exempt from some or all immunizations will be excluded from school if a vaccine- preventable disease is present in the school or an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable illness occurs in the community as declared by the local health authorities and/or the Texas Commissioner of Public Health. The school nurse will notify the parent when exclusion from school is necessary and when it is safe for the student to return to school. If the student is at school at the time of the outbreak, the parent must pick up the student from school immediately. The student will be excluded from school until the school nurse determines the threat of illness has passed.

\*Physician is defined as an M.D. or D.O., duly registered and licensed to practice medicine in the U.S. The physician may not be a parent or family member of the child.

## **Rationale:**

The Texas Department of State Health Services is granted the authority to set immunization requirements by Texas Education Code, Chapter 38 and Human Resource Code, Chapter 42.

The vaccine requirements are incorporated in Title 25 Health Services, §§97.61-97.72 of the Texas Administrative Code of the Department of State Health Services.

The vaccine requirements apply to all children and students entering, attending, enrolling in, and/or transferring to child-care facilities or public or private primary or secondary schools or institutions of higher education.

Requirements for Schools: **2015-16 Texas Minimum State Vaccine Requirements for Students Grades K-12 (Rev. 06/2015)**

Requirements for Child-Care Facilities: **2015-16 Texas Minimum State Vaccine Requirements for Child-Care Facilities (Rev. 05/2015)**

Immunization (vaccination) is a way of creating immunity to certain diseases by using small amounts of a killed or weakened microorganism that causes a certain disease. Microorganisms can be viruses, such as Varicella (chicken pox) or they can be bacterial, such as pneumococcus. Vaccines stimulate the body's immune system to react as if there were an actual infection. It builds up antibodies that recognize specific parts of the virus or bacteria. This permanent or long standing response means if the person is exposed to the actual disease the antibodies are already present and can combat the disease so the person does not get ill. Diseases for which immunizations are given tend to be highly contagious. They can spread quickly from person to person and from community to community. All of these diseases can cause serious complications and in some instances death.

The overwhelming majority of medical experts in the U.S. believe that the benefits of complete immunization far outweigh the risks. The U.S Public Health Service, the Centers for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Texas Department of State Health Services are some of the experts we have cited. Immunizations have protected millions of children from potentially deadly diseases and saved thousands of lives. Although most of these diseases are not common in the United States, they still persist around the world. It is important that we continue to protect our children with vaccines because outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease do still occur in this country. Examples of diseases in this country that have seen an increase in incidence are Pertussis (whooping cough) with more than 48,000 reported cases in 2012 and Measles with over 150 cases in several states last year.

Texas requires children in day care and public and private schools to be immunized against 11 diseases. The immunization schedule usually begins about 2 months of age and goes through 18 years for students and children. The recommended schedule is designed to protect young infants and children early in life, when they are most vulnerable and before they are exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases.

The medical and health care experts believe it is important for children to be **fully** immunized. Statistics have shown that since the start of widespread immunization of children the number of cases of once common childhood illnesses, such as measles and polio, has dropped dramatically. As people choose to not vaccinate their children fully, outbreaks become more common, especially of diseases that were once eradicated in this country. Diseases like measles, which were extremely rare in the U.S., are making a comeback as they are brought into the U.S. from other countries by travelers. Not receiving all doses of a vaccine leaves a child vulnerable to contracting serious diseases. If we stopped vaccinating, even the few cases we have in this country could quickly become hundreds or thousands of cases. Maintaining high immunization coverage in our community and country protects everyone.

A small percentage of children and students are unable to receive some or all of the required immunizations. Receiving certain immunizations could be detrimental to their health therefore making them ineligible to receive certain vaccines. Since it is contraindicated for them to have immunizations, an outbreak of any of the vaccine preventable diseases could be life threatening.

The Meningococcal vaccine provides protection against some of the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Meningococcal disease can be very serious. It spreads rapidly, typically among previously healthy children and adolescents, and results in high morbidity and mortality. Approximately 800-1200 cases are reported annually in the United States. The most severe and common illnesses caused by meningococcal disease are meningitis, infections of the fluid and lining around the brain, spinal cord septicemia, an infection of the bloodstream, and bacteremic pneumonia. While most people with meningitis recover, it can cause serious complications, such as brain damage, hearing loss and learning disabilities. The vaccine provides protection and controls the incidence of meningococcal disease in the US. It is recommended for groups of people considered at risk for the disease. These groups include adolescents, persons with certain medical conditions and those with increased risk of exposure.

While the Meningococcal vaccine is recommended by the Texas Minimum State Requirements to be given to preteen students 11-12 years old who are entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade, we recommend students receive this vaccine at the 11 year old check- up.

## **Resources**

**CDC** [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

**Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices** [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/)

**American Academy of Pediatrics** [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) ; [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

**National Vaccine Information Center** [www.nvic.org/vaccines](http://www.nvic.org/vaccines)

**Texas Department of State Health Services** [www.dshs.state.tx/immunize/school](http://www.dshs.state.tx/immunize/school)

[www.KidsHealth.org](http://www.KidsHealth.org)

[www.ImmunizeUSA.org](http://www.ImmunizeUSA.org)