




# COMMUNICATION UPDATE

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members Board of Health
<b>DATE:</b>	September 27, 2024
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Enforcement of Immunization of School Pupils Act (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Jordan Walker Director, Communicable Disease Control Division Public Health Services
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

This communication is to provide Council with an update on the Hamilton Public Health Services Vaccine Program as we are approaching the yearly initiation of the enforcement of the *Immunization of School Pupils Act (1990)*, which is one element of our immunization program. This program component may lead to questions from the public.

The *Immunization of School Pupils Act* is an Ontario law that requires students attending school to have an up-to-date immunization record, or a valid exemption, on file with local public health. The purpose the Act: “is to increase the protection of the health of children against the diseases that are designated diseases under this Act”.<sup>1</sup> These diseases are Diphtheria, Mumps, Tetanus, Polio, Rubella, Pertussis, Varicella (for those born after 2010), Measles, and Meningococcal.

Our immunization programs work to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases and to reduce the risk of outbreaks. Vaccines are one of the most important and effective interventions we have to keep people healthy and prevent serious diseases. Ensuring high vaccination rates in our schools helps to protect both the vaccinated and those that are at risk of severe disease but cannot be vaccinated (e.g., individuals who cannot be vaccinated due to medical or religious reasons).

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<sup>1</sup> Immunization of School Pupils Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. I.1, Ontario, Canada, available at: [Immunization of School Pupils Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. I.1 \(ontario.ca\)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statutes/90/i1) (Accessed: September 3, 2024)

Public Health Services' role with respect to the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* is to:

- Provide opportunities for students to receive *Immunization of School Pupils Act* vaccines through:
  - Grade 7 school-based vaccine clinics, including Grade 8 catch-up clinics;
  - Secondary school catch-up clinics; and,
  - Catch-up clinics for those behind in vaccinations, with a particular focus on easing access for equity deserving populations and those without a primary care provider.
- Screen vaccination records for all children in school to ensure they are up to date with vaccinations and providing reminders to get up to date;
- Provide primary care with updated messaging regarding annual *Immunization of School Pupils Act* activities to support their planning and advise them of the potential increase in demand for the vaccinations they provide; and,
- Order exclusions from school for students who have not met the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* requirements by the designated date, that will be enforced for a period of up to 20 days, or until the student submits up-to-date vaccination records or a valid exemption.

Information about our vaccine programs and services can be found here:

[www.hamilton.ca/immunization](http://www.hamilton.ca/immunization).

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a decrease in overall immunization rates among children for routine childhood and school-age vaccinations. Response to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the ability of Public Health Services and primary care to provide access to immunization services. While vaccination rates post-pandemic has improved, the percentage of students with an up-to-date vaccine record continues to be lower compared to pre-pandemic, both in Hamilton and province wide. Historically, enforcement of the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* has been necessary to achieve compliance and ensure vaccination rates reach levels high enough to limit transmission and prevent outbreaks.

Annually, Public Health Services assesses the vaccination records of all children attending school. If student vaccination records are identified as missing, notices are sent to students/parents/guardians. If the required immunizations are not up-to-date, or a valid exemption has not been received, notice is given to the school Principal to suspend the child from school. The suspension will be rescinded, and the school will be advised that the student may be returned to school once Public Health Services is provided with the necessary information.

In July 2024 (Q3), summer screening notices were distributed to students who were missing up-to-date vaccination records, or a valid exemption with Hamilton Public Health. Beginning in November 2024 (Q4), Public Health Services will resume the

enforcement of *Immunization of School Pupils Act*. To manage the volume of overdue records our approach to enforcement will be done in a phased way over the next two school years. Focus in 2024-2025 is on the following grades: Senior Kindergarten and Grades 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

This process starts with the distribution of screening notices advising students, parents, and guardians of missing records and will provide them with a date these will be due back to Public Health Services, to avoid possible exclusion from school.

Hamilton Public Health Services makes every effort to get vaccines to students, through health care providers and Public Health Services' clinics. Our goal is to prevent students from being excluded from school. Hamilton Public Health Services will be informing local health care providers of planned suspension dates. Further, it will seek health care provider's support with vaccinating patients who present with screening and suspension letters. A request will also be made for health care providers to advise parents and guardians to report their child's vaccinations to Hamilton Public Health Services.

Hamilton Public Health Services will have routine catch up vaccination clinics available during the school year for students who do not have an Ontario health card. At the start of the suspension periods, Hamilton Public Health Services will also host clinics to provide students the opportunity to receive vaccinations and avoid exclusion from school.

Further information on the Vaccine Program's roles and responsibilities under the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* can be found in the February 2024 Public Health Committee information report (BOH24002 – Immunization of Schools Pupils Act Information Report).

If you have any questions, or require additional information, please contact Jordan Walker, Director, Communicable Disease Control Division, Public Health Services at Ext. 7465 or [jordan.walker@hamilton.ca](mailto:jordan.walker@hamilton.ca).

#### **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Not Applicable.