




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members Board of Health
DATE:	January 24, 2025
SUBJECT:	Enforcement of Immunization of School Pupils Act (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Jordan Walker Director, Communicable Disease Control Division Public Health Services
SIGNATURE:	

This communication is to provide an update on the work of the Hamilton Public Health Services Vaccine Program related to enforcement of *the Immunization of School Pupils Act (1990)*. As required under the *Act*, suspensions of children who are not up to date with their vaccines or have not provided a valid exemption will begin at the end of this week. This may lead to you receiving 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 of the *Act* “is to increase the protection of the health of children against the diseases that are designated diseases under this Act”.¹ These diseases are Diphtheria, Mumps, Tetanus, Polio, Rubella, Pertussis, Varicella (for those born after 2010), Measles, and Meningococcal disease.

Public Health works to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases and to reduce the risk of outbreaks, in tandem with immunizations provided through primary care and others in the community. Vaccines are one of the most important and effective interventions to keep people healthy and prevent serious diseases. Recent cases of measles in Hamilton, across Canada and abroad underscore the importance of these immunizations. Ensuring high vaccination rates in our schools helps protect both the vaccinated and those who are at risk of severe disease but cannot be vaccinated due to medical reasons. The pandemic led to lower levels of complete vaccine records due in part to reduced access to immunization providers. Over the last two years significant

¹ Immunization of School Pupils Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. I.1, Ontario, Canada, available at: [ImmuneOntario.ca](http://www.ontario.ca)

efforts have been made to catch children up with immunization prior to resuming enforcement of the *Act*. Further information about our vaccine programs and services can be found here: www.hamilton.ca/immunization.

Reducing suspensions under the *Act* is very important. Public Health communicates with schools and primary care providers each year about the level of need for vaccine catch-up and timing for record reviews and enforcement, encouraging practitioners to look for opportunities to check in about any missed vaccinations. Public Health directly operates vaccination catch up clinics in schools and the community, with a particular focus on easing access for equity deserving populations and those without a primary care provider.

Annually, Public Health Services assesses the vaccination records of all children attending school. Screening notices are distributed advising students/parents/guardians of missing records and providing them with a date these will be due to be caught up and reported back to Public Health to avoid possible exclusion from school. If vaccination records or valid exemptions are not received, students undergoing enforcement will be suspended from school for a period of up to 20 school days or until Public Health Services receives the necessary information.

In November 2024, screening notices were distributed to students who were missing up-to-date vaccination records or a valid exemption with Hamilton Public Health. Beginning this week Public Health will resume the enforcement of *The Immunization of School Pupils Act*, including suspension. Due to the volume of overdue records, enforcement is being done in a phased way over the next two school years. Focus in the 2024-2025 school year is on Senior Kindergarten and Grades 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12.

As noted, at the start of the suspension periods, Public Health Services hosts clinics to provide students at risk of suspension the opportunity to receive vaccinations and avoid exclusion from school. Parents and students at risk of suspension through enforcement can visit our website at <https://www.hamilton.ca/suspensionclinics> for an up-to-date clinic schedule and information on how to attend clinics. Additional routine catch up vaccination clinics are available during the school year for students who do not have an Ontario health card, as well as those in high school settings.

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*.

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.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable.