DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SCHOOL IMMUNIZATION POLICY

Frequently Asked Questions - School Immunization Requirements (for Families)

District law[1] and regulations[2] require schools in the District of Columbia to verify student compliance with the pediatric immunization requirements[3] as part of enrollment and attendance. If a student is not compliant, the school is required to immediately notify the parent, guardian, or adult student in writing of the missing immunization(s).

If a student in grade pre-K 3, kindergarten, 7, or 11 does not come into compliance before Dec. 8, 2025, the school is required to temporarily exclude the student from school until the immunization certification is secured by the school.

1. Why are immunizations (vaccines) important?

Vaccines are important because they help stop the spread of diseases like measles, which can be very contagious and dangerous for children. To keep everyone safe, all students should get their vaccines before starting school. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has information about why vaccines are important, including Common Questions About Vaccines,[4] Making the Vaccine Decision: Addressing Common Concerns,[5] and Vaccine (Shot) for Human Papillomavirus.[6]

2. Which immunizations does my child need?

DC Health decides which vaccines your child needs based on their age.[7] Check out DC Health's Immunization Requirements[3] to find the list of required immunizations.

3. How do I know which shots my child has already received?

If you want to know which immunizations your child has received, you can ask your health care provider for a copy of your child's immunization records. You can also call the DC Health Immunization Program at (202) 576-7130.

4. How does my child's school know whether my child has been immunized?

When your child gets a vaccine in the District of Columbia, the healthcare provider adds it to the District of Columbia Immunization Information System (DOCIIS). Schools use DOCIIS to check if students have their required immunizations. Schools might also keep paper records of your child's shots in their health files. If your child got a vaccine outside of the District of Columbia, it might not be in DOCIIS.

5. How do I submit proof of immunization to my child's school?

If DOCIIS doesn't show that your child has all the required immunizations, the school will ask for proof. You can give them a written record, like a completed Universal Health Certificate (recommended) or another official record from your doctor with the doctor's stamp, seal, or signature.[3] The school will then put this information in DOCIIS and your child's health file. If you have an appointment card for an immunization scheduled before Dec. 31, you can use it to meet the requirements temporarily, but you must show proof of the immunization the next school day to avoid being temporarily excluded (if after exclusion day, Dec. 8).

6. If my child does not have all their immunizations, will they be able to go to school?

Vaccines are important to keep everyone safe, including students and school communities. Students are required to get additional immunizations at certain ages: before pre-K 3, kindergarten, 7th grade, and 11th grade. Students in these grades can only go to school for a short time without proof of immunization. If your child is in grades pre-K 3, kindergarten, 7, or 11 and does not have the required immunizations, the school will send you a letter that says you will have until Dec. 8 to show proof of immunizations. If you do not provide the information, your child will not be allowed back in school until they get the immunizations and you give the proof to the school.

7. What will happen if my child does not get all their required immunizations?

If your child does not have all their required immunizations, the school will send you a letter saying which immunizations are missing. For students in grades pre-K 3, kindergarten, 7, and 11, the school will also send a warning that your child will be temporarily excluded if you do not show proof of the shots by Dec. 8.

You should make an appointment with your child's healthcare provider right away. If you don't show proof of immunization by Dec. 9, your child will not be allowed to go back to school until they get the immunizations, and you provide the proof to the school.

Your child will get an "unexcused absence" for each missed school day until you show proof of the immunizations. Once the school gets the proof, your child can return to school, and each missed day will be changed to an "excused absence."

8. What do I do if I believe my child has all their required immunizations, but the school tells me that my child is missing one or more?

a. Check with Your Child's Healthcare Provider: Ask if your child has received the required immunizations.

- If they did, ask for written proof with the doctor's stamp, seal, or signature to give to the school.
- If they didn't, make an appointment right away for the immunizations.

b. Get Written Proof: At the appointment, have the doctor fill out the Universal Health Certificate (recommended) or another form with the doctor's stamp, seal, or signature. [3]

c. Give Proof to the School: Give the documents to your child's school so they can add it to your child's health file.

9. What if my child cannot be immunized?

If your child cannot get immunizations for medical reasons, they can get a medical exemption. A private doctor or public health authority must sign this exemption. For religious exemptions, check the DC Health website. You can also opt out of the HPV vaccine by giving the school the DC Health Annual Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination Opt-Out Certificate. [8]

10. What if the earliest appointment I could get for my child is after the start of the school year?

Healthcare providers can be busy at the start of school, so plan ahead. Make sure your child gets all required immunizations before school starts. You can find a list of pediatric immunization locations on the DC Health website. [3]

11. What if I do not have a primary care provider or if I do not have medical insurance?

If you or your child don't have a healthcare provider, call your insurance company to find one near you. If you don't have insurance, contact DC Health Link or the Citywide Call Center by dialing 3-1-1. [9]

12. What if I have documentation for immunizations that were received in another country?

If your child got immunizations in another country, ask your school nurse or the school's immunization point of contact (IPOC) about the documentation. They will check with DC Health to see if it meets the requirements, or if you need to take additional steps.

13. What if I have questions about immunizations or the immunization requirements for school attendance and activities?

For questions about immunizations and resources, contact the DC Health Immunization Program at (202) 576-7130 or visit their website at dchealth.dc.gov/immunization. For questions about school immunization policies, contact your school or local education agency (LEA) central office. You can also email OSSE at OSSE.SchoolHealth@dc.gov. [10]

This FAQ document will be updated over time.
Last update date: July 31, 2025.

Endnotes

1 DC Official Code § 38–501 et seq.: code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/titles/38/chapters/5/

2 DCMR 5-E § 5300 et seq.: dcregs.dc.gov/common/dcmr/rulelist.aspx?ChapterNum=5-e53&chapterid=258

3 dchealth.dc.gov/immunization

4 cdc.gov/vaccines-children/about/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/FAQs.html

5 cdc.gov/vaccines-children/reasons/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/why-vaccinate/vaccine-decision.html

6 cdc.gov/vaccines-children/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/diseases/hpv.html

7 DCMR 22-B §§ 130-152: dcregs.dc.gov/Common/DCMR/RuleList.aspx?ChapterNum=22-B1&ChapterId=576

8 dchealth.dc.gov/service/immunization-forms

9 dchealthlink.com

10 osse.dc.gov/immunization