



Pat Quinn, Governor

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January 25, 2012

Dear Parent:

Numerous outbreaks of pertussis (whooping cough) have occurred recently among school children in Illinois. Pertussis is easily transmitted through coughing and sneezing and may cause an illness that persists for weeks to months. Pertussis does not typically cause severe illness in healthy students, but can cause prolonged absences from school and extracurricular activities. In addition, pertussis can be transmitted from healthy students to infants and individuals with chronic illnesses, for whom pertussis can be life-threatening.

Protection against pertussis begins to wear off during grade school. This leaves pre-teens, teenagers and adults at risk for this illness. To address the increase in pertussis cases among older students, a booster vaccination (called Tdap) is recommended for all students in grades six through twelve.

**This fall, students entering sixth and ninth grades will be required to provide proof of Tdap vaccination along with the school physical forms that are also required for these grades.**

Students in these grades without one of the following will be subject to exclusion:

1. Proof of Tdap vaccination
2. An approved medical or religious exemption on file with the school,
3. An appointment to receive the Tdap shot during the school year.

See the "Frequently Asked Questions About the Tdap Vaccine Requirement" for more information.

Many providers, local pharmacies and most local health departments provide Tdap vaccinations. Many providers participate in the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, which provides vaccines at no cost to doctors who serve Medicaid-eligible children younger than 19 years of age. If you need assistance, check with your local health department for resources for getting Tdap vaccination.

Check with your doctor if you are not sure if your child has received Tdap, and if not, get your child vaccinated.

Healthy children are best prepared to learn and thrive inside and outside our schools.

## Frequently asked questions about the Tdap Vaccine Requirement for School Entry Illinois Department of Public Health

### **What is Tdap?**

**Tdap** is a vaccine licensed and recommended to protect pre-teens, adolescents and adults against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough). Tdap is licensed for routine use on or after the 10th birthday.

### **How is the new Tdap vaccine rule being implemented in Illinois schools?**

**During school year 2012-2013, students entering sixth and ninth grades will be required to provide documentation of receipt of one dose of Tdap.** *Please note that students entering six and ninth grades are also required to have school physicals.*

### **What type of documentation of Tdap vaccination\* is needed to meet the new requirements?**

The following documents will be accepted:

- Note or letter, signed by physician
- Print-out from provider's electronic medical record system
- Certificate of Child Health Examination, specifying exact date of Tdap shot.

*Note: exact date of Tdap vaccination is required when providing Tdap documentation.*

### **What if my child had whooping cough recently or in the past?**

Any protection (immunity) developed after having whooping cough wears off, leaving your child at risk for getting whooping cough again. Tdap is needed to protect your child in the future and to meet the school requirement.

### **Instead of getting a Tdap vaccine booster to meet the new requirement, can a student get a blood test to test for protection (immunity) against whooping cough?**

No. Testing for immunity is not reliable and will not meet the new school requirement.

### **How long do you have to wait after your last tetanus vaccine before getting Tdap?**

Tdap may be given at any time after the last tetanus vaccine.

### **What if my 6<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade child does not have proof of a Tdap vaccine before school starts?**

Unless a medical or religious exemption has been approved, or your child has an appointment to get the Tdap vaccine during the school year, your child will be subject to exclusion from school on or before 10/15/2012.

### **Where can my child receive Tdap vaccination?**

Children should visit their regular health care provider to get Tdap and other recommended vaccines as soon as possible. Many providers and most local health departments provide Tdap vaccinations. Uninsured or underinsured students can receive Tdap vaccine through a federally qualified health centers. In addition, pharmacies can provide Tdap vaccine to children 14 years of age and older. If you need assistance, please check with your local health department for resources for getting required Tdap vaccinations.

### **Should other students, teachers, school staff and family members also get the Tdap vaccine?**

Although school staff and parents are not required to receive the Tdap vaccine, the Illinois Department of Public Health recommends that all persons 10 years of age and older get vaccinated with Tdap to protect against the ongoing threat of whooping cough. Immunization also helps to protect close contacts, including young infants for whom whooping cough is most severe and sometimes fatal.

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\* Pediatric DTaP or DTP is only licensed for use in persons less than 7 years of age, but may be accepted if inadvertently administered to students aged 7 and older. Receipt of Td (brand name DECAVAC or TENIVAC) or DT does not meet the new school Tdap requirement because they do not protect against pertussis.