

August 25, 2020

Dear Administrator,

COVID-19 may interrupt school this fall, but vaccine-preventable diseases don't have to. North Dakota Century Code 23-07-17 mandates all students in kindergarten through 12th grade meet a minimum number of required immunizations **prior** to school entrance, and each school is responsible for excluding non-compliant students after October 1. Children enrolling in school after October 1 have 30 days to be up-to-date or claim an exemption, or they must be excluded from school. **Even if a child is participating in distance learning, they are still required to be up to date on their immunizations.** Schools should notify parents of incoming students of immunization requirements for this fall. Immunization requirements for the 2020-2021 school year, template letters for parents, and frequently asked questions can be found on our [website](#).

With the current COVID-19 pandemic in the United States and across the world, the importance of vaccinations and maintaining immunization rates has become more critical. Immunization rates must reach 95% in order to keep diseases from spreading if introduced into a school. Once rates fall below the 95% threshold, schools become vulnerable to outbreaks of diseases. Having vaccine-preventable diseases and COVID-19 circulating within a school at the same time would lead to large numbers of school absences, school closures, and adversely affect the health of our students.

This fall and winter, both COVID-19 and influenza will be circulating at the same time. Both are respiratory illnesses and have similar symptoms. Influenza vaccination of children and staff will play an important role in ensuring school attendance by preventing respiratory symptoms that may lead to school exclusion. The flu vaccine will not prevent COVID-19 but does protect against a severe respiratory illness that last year alone caused 187 pediatric deaths in the United States. Preventing the flu reduces the burden of disease on our health care system, both testing and hospital capacity. While it may seem like there is so much out of our control during this pandemic, getting vaccinated against influenza is within our control and will protect not only those who receive flu vaccine but also the school and community. Schools can play a key role in increasing influenza vaccination rates by encouraging vaccination and hosting school-located influenza vaccination clinics.

Please contact the NDDoH Immunization Program at 701-328-3386 or toll-free at 800-472-2180 with any questions or concerns regarding school immunizations.



Jenny Galbraith, Immunization Surveillance Coordinator