

Are your child's immunizations up to date?

With some recent changes to the Immunization of School Pupils Act, the provincial government has boosted requirements for keeping their records up to date and correct.

The updates include mandatory immunizations and dose requirements that align with changes to Ontario's publicly-funded Immunization Program.

Students attending primary or secondary school this fall will need to have proof of immunization against three more diseases: meningococcal disease, whooping cough and, for children born in 2010 or later, chickenpox.

Many harmful diseases have been nearly eradicated in Ontario because of publicly funded vaccines, but children and youth who fail to get immunized still face serious risks, said Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, in a news release. That's why our government is updating the requirements for school-aged children to be protected from vaccine preventable diseases.

The Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health department said there wasn't any single reason or concern to spur on the changes, but that it is a product of the province helping to improve immunization rates and sound records for students.

Based on their records, WDG Public Health said of the 2,348 students enrolled in elementary and high schools in Shelburne, 220 are not fully immunized. Of the 220, many will have had their first dose of the two dose Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccination and are overdue for their second dose.

With measles being reported in communities in Ontario now is a good time to check your immunization records, says Rita Sethi, Manager of Community Health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. Measles is a very contagious and potentially dangerous illness. If it shows it up in a local school we need to ensure it doesn't spread in the community and the Medical Officer of Health could suspend children who are not fully immunized from attending school.

Parents who are unsure if their children are fully immunized with the MMR vaccine should call their doctor's office.

In terms of what people need to do to comply with the new rules, the provincial government said in news release that parents should take the following steps to ensure their children meet the new immunization requirements:

- 1) Double-check with their doctor, nurse practitioner or local public health unit to make sure their children's immunization records are up to date.
- 2) Make sure that their child's updated immunization record has been reported to their local public health unit.

Once the school year begins, parents will be contacted by the local public health unit if catch-up immunizations are required and parents of children who require an immunization exemption should speak to their local public health unit. Parents have a variety of different avenues to take if they are looking for more information or help. You can download the Ministry of Health's free phone app for keeping track of immunizations and you can also visit www.wdgpulichealth.ca

By Jeff Doner