



IMMUNIZATIONS FOR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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Vaccinations offer protection from common infectious diseases. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends specific vaccines for all infants, children, and adults during their lifetime to provide immunization from preventable illness. According to the CDC, the recommended child immunization schedule prevents about 20 million cases of illness and 42,200 deaths per year.

Colorado Immunization Requirements and Exemptions

Colorado law requires every child who is attending school in the state to present an up-to-date certificate of immunization from a doctor, advanced practice nurse, or public health agency stating that the child has received immunization against certain communicable diseases specified by the State Board of Health.¹ The state board specifies the required immunizations based on the recommendations of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and the American Academy of Pediatrics. The law permits a parent or legal guardian to sign a written authorization allowing local health officials to administer the immunization. State law also allows for a student to be exempt from the immunization requirements for medical reasons, religious beliefs, or personal beliefs.

If an immunization is not given for medical reasons, a doctor or an advanced practice nurse must submit certification to the student's school that the student's medical condition is such that receiving the required immunizations would cause harm to his or her health. If an immunization is not given due to religious and personal beliefs, a statement of exemption must be submitted to the student's school that is signed by one of the student's parents or legal guardians.

Immunization Rates and State Rankings

According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, Colorado ranked lowest nationally in the percentage of vaccination coverage among children enrolled in kindergarten in calendar year 2013. This determination was based on data from the CDC.

Table 1
Selected Vaccination Information for 2013

	Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)	Combined Vaccine Series*
National Target	90.0%	90.0%
National Coverage	91.9%	70.4%
Colorado	86.0%	69.2%
State with Highest Immunization Rate	New Hampshire (96.3%)	Rhode Island (82.1%)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

* Includes DTaP, poliovirus, MMR, Hib, HepB, varicella, and PCV vaccinations.

¹Section 25-4-902, *et seq.*, C.R.S.

The Colorado Immunization Branch within the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) conducts an annual survey of immunization rates and compliance among schools. A random sample of 350 kindergarteners is surveyed from a pool of 60,000 public and private school students from 292 schools. The survey found that most of the exemptions are for personal beliefs and that over 30 percent of kindergarteners that started school in the 2013-14 school year did not have one or more of the required immunizations in their school immunization record. According to the CDPHE Colorado Kindergarten School Immunization Survey of 2013-2014, the non-medical vaccination exemption rate among children in kindergarten in Colorado is 4.6 percent while the national average is 1.8 percent.

Colorado Immunization Information System

The Colorado Immunization Information System (CIIS), also known as the state immunization registry, is a confidential, computerized, population-based system that collects and consolidates immunization data for all persons born, residing in, or receiving immunizations in Colorado. The CIIS was established under the Immunization Registry Act, which was enacted in Colorado in 2007 and is maintained by the CDPHE.² The CIIS contains immunization records for more than 4.4 million Colorado residents and 99 percent of all children ages zero to six in the state. State law restricts what immunization information can be released and to whom. Additionally, mechanisms exist for people to exclude their or their children's data from the CIIS. Additional information about the CIIS can be found at: <http://www.coloradoiis.com>.

Recent Colorado Legislation and Regulation Concerning Immunizations

In recent years, Colorado has addressed issues pertaining to child immunizations through statute and new State Board of Health rules.

In 2013, Senate Bill 13-222 created a task force to study how to provide affordable, sustainable, and geographically diverse solutions that address vaccination barriers across Colorado. The task force issued its final recommendations in June 2014, specifying vaccines should be easily accessible in common care settings, the CIIS infrastructure should be user-friendly and accessible, and that the CDPHE and task force stakeholders must coordinate to increase delivery and access to vaccinations across Colorado.³

In 2014, House Bill 14-1288 required the State Board of Health to create rules concerning immunization and exemption rates that the CDPHE must make available to the public. The act also required schools to make student immunization and exemption rates publicly available upon request. The CDPHE must create an online learning module explaining the benefits and risks associated with vaccinations. Finally, the bill requires the CDPHE to work with other state agencies as appropriate to standardize immunization data collection and sharing among schools.

In April 2015, the State Board of Health passed new immunization rules modifying non-medical exemptions concerning vaccinations. Under current law, parents seeking non-medical exemptions for kindergarten children are only required to submit exemption forms once in a child's academic career. As of July 2016, parents seeking non-medical exemptions for kindergarten children must submit exemption forms to schools at each age that recommended vaccines are required. The new rules also require parents to annually submit non-medical exemption forms to schools from kindergarten through 12th grade.

²Section 25-4-2401, *et seq.*, C.R.S.

³*Final Recommendations to Increase Access to Childhood Vaccines Across Colorado* Presented by the Senate Bill 13-222 Task Force on June 3, 2014: https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/Imm_SB222-Stakeholder-Presentation-May-28-2014.pdf