



## Vaccinations 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 immunity from preventable illness. A recent analysis estimated that for children born in a single year in the United States, vaccination prevented nearly 20 million cases of disease and over 40,000 deaths.<sup>1</sup>

### Colorado Immunization Requirements and Exemptions

Colorado law requires every child who is attending school in the state to present to a school official 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 the student to receive scheduled immunizations at a school-based health clinic if available. State law also allows for a student to be exempt from the immunization requirements for medical reasons, or the religious or personal beliefs of the parents or students.

If an immunization is not given for medical reasons, certification signed by a doctor or an advanced practice nurse must be submitted to the student's school stating 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, Senate Bill 20-163, enacted in 2020, requires a signed certificate of nonmedical exemption or a certificate of completion of an online education module to be submitted at the same frequency an immunization record is required to be submitted. The online education module is administered by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and includes evidence-based scientific data about the benefits and risks of immunizations. Prior to passage of this law, parents could submit a nonmedical exemption by submitting a statement with the student's information, date of exemption, immunizations declined, and type of exemption (personal belief or religious). Colorado is one of 15 states that allow philosophical exemptions to immunizations for personal, moral, or other beliefs.

Schools are required to have on file for all students either an immunization record, a valid medical or nonmedical exemption, or a written plan from the parent or student for how they will become up-to-date. The Colorado Code of Regulations requires all schools, preschools, child care centers, and Head Start programs with ten or more children to report aggregate immunization and exemption data to the CDPHE.

Data for kindergarten students and kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in school year 2018-2019 showed compliance rates of 88.4 and 92.5 percent, respectively. Of the students who had a vaccine exemption, the majority had a personal belief exemption. For example, for the Diphtheria, Tetanus, and acellular Pertussis vaccine (DTaP) exemptions

<sup>1</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5402432/#r4>

<sup>2</sup>Section 25-4-902, *et seq.*, C.R.S.

for kindergartners, 89.1 percent were for personal beliefs, 8.1 percent were for religious beliefs, and 2.8 percent were for medical reasons. Exemptions from other vaccines had similar breakdowns.<sup>3</sup>

### 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.<sup>4</sup> State law restricts what immunization information can be released and to whom. Individuals are able to decline having their immunization information included in the CIIS.

### 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.

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 and CDPHE to create an online learning module explaining the benefits and risks associated with vaccinations.

In April 2015, the State Board of Health passed new immunization rules modifying nonmedical exemptions concerning vaccinations. As of July 2016, parents seeking nonmedical 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 nonmedical exemption forms to schools from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Senate Bill 20-163 amended the requirements for submission of a nonmedical exemption. CDPHE indicates that school year 2021-2022 is the current target for these changes to be implemented. The bill set a goal of a 95 percent vaccination rate for every school, and requires schools to actively share their immunization rates with parents. CDPHE is also required to annually evaluate the state’s immunization practices, and the State Board of Health may update the state’s immunization practices based on their findings. Finally, the bill requires health care practitioners to submit immunization and exemption data to the CIIS.

### Immunization Rates and State Rankings

Healthy People 2020, which identifies national health improvement goals from the federal government, set a national target of 95 percent vaccination rate for kindergartners for both the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) and DTaP vaccines. According to the CDC, Colorado ranked lowest nationally in the percentage of kindergarten children who received the MMR and varicella vaccinations, and second to last in percentage of kindergarten children who received the DTaP vaccinations, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Selected Vaccination Rate for Kindergartners**  
**2018-2019 School Year**

	<b>MMR Vaccination</b>	<b>DTaP Vaccination</b>
National Target	95.0%	95.0%
National Vaccination Rate	94.7%	94.9%
Colorado	87.4%	90.3%
State with Highest Immunization Rate	Mississippi (99.2%)	Mississippi (99.2%)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>3</sup><https://docs.google.com/document/d/11Hys50el6Ob24PkpSwlWTKbKaeCicSpkhd5ZPuOJ9-M/edit>

<sup>4</sup>Section 25-4-2401, *et seq.*, C.R.S.