

Do you have a child about to enter the 6th grade?

If so, you need to know about a new immunization requirement for 6th grade entry.

Q. What is the new immunization requirement?

A. A booster dose of Tdap vaccine is required for all children before entering 6th grade that are enrolled in public school, or by age 12 for those not attending public schools (i.e., private, religious, home schools) on or after August 1, 2008, if 5 years or more have passed since the last dose of tetanus-containing vaccine.

Q. What is Tdap?

A. Tdap is a combination of three vaccines that provides protection against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough).

Q. Why does my child need this vaccine?

A. Every year, as many as 1 million teenagers and adults in the U.S. are infected with whooping cough. There has been an increase in whooping cough in the U.S. in recent years. Most children are fully protected against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis prior to entering kindergarten because of the DTaP vaccine. However, protection against these diseases decreases after about 10 years. By giving adolescents a booster dose of Tdap, they will receive protection against these deadly diseases for the years to come.

Q. When did this law go into effect?

A. The law went into effect January 1, 2008 and impacts all students beginning with the 2008-09 school year.

Q. Is the vaccine safe and effective?

A. Yes. The most common side effects are pain and swelling at the site of injection. While the vaccine does not cause serious side effects, some people feel tired or experience headaches. Tdap has been shown to decrease the incidence of pertussis by 90 percent.

Q. Where can I get this vaccine/How much will it cost?

A. You can get this vaccine at your doctor's office or local health department. While the Tdap vaccine is free, your health care provider may charge an administrative fee to give the vaccine.

Q. If my child got a vaccine called Td does he/she still need the Tdap vaccine?

A. Maybe. Td is the vaccine to prevent tetanus and diphtheria. Tdap provides additional protection against pertussis (commonly called whooping cough). If it has been more than five years since you child received a dose of tetanus-containing vaccine, they will need a dose of Tdap.

However, if it has been less than five years since you child received a dose of tetanus-containing vaccine, they are not required by law to have a booster dose of Tdap to enter the 6th grade. Consider talking to your child's doctor about whether or not they would benefit from receiving a dose of Tdap at this time.

Q. What should I do next?

A. Contact your child's health care provider or local health department to schedule an appointment to receive a dose of Tdap if your child has not received Td or Tdap within the past five years. Your child needs to receive this vaccine and show proof of vaccination prior to entering the 6th grade.

Be sure that the doctor provides a Certificate of Immunization that documents the dose of tetanus-containing vaccine received and the date.

Q. How do I show proof of vaccination?

A. A physician, health clinic or local health department must give a Certificate of Immunization to the person who brings the child for immunization. You must give a copy of this Certificate of Immunization to your child's school to show proof of vaccination for Tdap.

Q. What immunization exemptions are available under North Carolina Law?

A. There are only two types of exemptions from required immunization that are available in the state of North Carolina. The two types of exemptions are medical and religious. There is no exemption available for personal beliefs.

Q. Are there any other shots my child should get?

A. Yes, the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following vaccines for this age group:

- Meningococcal,
- Hepatitis A,
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) – for girls only
- Flu, and
- A Second Dose of Varicella (chickenpox).

These vaccines are not required by law, but are strongly recommended for adolescents. For more information about these vaccines, talk to your doctor.

Q. How can I learn more?

A. Contact Julie Rogers, APA school nurse, your physician, or local health department. You can also call the NC Immunization Branch at 919-707-5550 or go online at www.immunizenc.com for more information.