

Ontario strengthens immunization requirements for next school year

Ontario is helping children and youth stay healthy by requiring their immunizations to be up to date before they return to school in September.

The province has updated the immunization requirements for the 2014-15 school year to include new mandatory immunizations and dose requirements that align with changes to Ontario's publicly-funded Immunization Program.

All 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. This is in addition to updated dose requirements for tetanus, diphtheria, polio and mumps immunizations. Requirements for measles and rubella immunizations have not changed, according to a new release issued by the Province last week.

There has been concern lately over the number of cases of measles reported in Ontario. Peel Region's Associate Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa recently told Regional councillors that immunization is key to avoid getting the disease.

Parents should take the following steps to ensure that their children meet the new immunization requirements: Double-check with their doctor, nurse practitioner or local public health unit to make sure their children's immunization records are up to date; and 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.

Following Ontario's Immunization Schedule and maintaining immunization records are important steps to prevent the spread of these diseases in the community, according to the news release. These diseases can spread easily in schools and can lead to serious health consequences especially in children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Protecting Ontarians from vaccine preventable diseases is part of the Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care to keep Ontario healthy. It is also part of the government's economic plan that is creating jobs for today and tomorrow by focusing on Ontario's greatest strengths - its people and strategic partnerships.

Thanks to vaccines, infectious diseases that were the leading cause of death worldwide 100 years ago are now the cause of less than five per cent of all deaths in Canada.

Vaccines for meningococcal disease, whooping cough and chickenpox are publicly funded and part of Ontario's routine immunization schedule. They are also consistent with current clinical guidelines for best protecting Ontario's children from disease. The Province currently publicly funds 21 different (routine and non-routine) vaccines through its provincial immunization program that protect against 16 diseases.

Parents of children who require an immunization exemption should speak to their local public health unit. Children who are exempt from immunization are at increased risk and may be removed from school during a disease outbreak.