

AB 354: The New 7th – 12th Grade California Immunization Law
California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch

What SCHOOLS Need To Know
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the new Tdap requirement for 7th – 12th Graders?

On September 29, 2010, AB 354, a new law changing California immunization requirements for students entering 7th-12th grades in public and private schools was passed. The law requires:

- This coming school year (2011-2012), all students entering into 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grades will need proof of an adolescent whooping cough booster shot (called "Tdap") before starting school.
- For the next school year (2012-13) and future school years, all students entering into 7th grade only will need proof of a Tdap shot to start school.

Are ALL 7th – 12th grade students required to get the "Tdap" shot?

Yes. For the 2011 – 2012 school year, all students entering or advancing into 7th – 12th grades must have proof of having had the Tdap booster shot before starting school. This includes current students, new students and transfer students in both public and private schools. Beginning in the 2012 – 2013 school year, the law will only affect 7th graders. Limited exemptions are allowed.

Why was the Tdap requirement added?

This new immunization requirement is intended to help reduce the spread of whooping cough disease among California's youth. In recent years, California, as well as the rest of the United States, has seen an increase in the number of whooping cough cases. In 2010, California experienced the most reported cases in over 60 years.

Most children are fully protected against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis prior to entering kindergarten because of the DTaP vaccine. However, immunity to these diseases wears off making adolescents vulnerable to whooping cough. Adolescents who receive a booster dose of Tdap will be protected during their school years. Immunization also helps to protect close contacts, including young infants for whom pertussis is most severe and sometimes fatal.

What are the diseases, tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough)?

- *Tetanus* – also called lockjaw, tetanus causes painful tightening of the muscles. It can lead to "locking" of the jaw so the person cannot his/her mouth or swallow.
- *Diphtheria* – is a throat infection that can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure and death.
- *Pertussis* – also known as whooping cough, is a contagious disease that causes violent coughing fits that make it hard to breathe. It spreads easily when someone with the disease coughs or sneezes. Symptoms can last for months. Whooping cough is particularly dangerous for young babies.

Why is the new Tdap requirement good for schools?

In addition to protecting the health of your students and their families, the new Tdap requirement helps keep your school healthy. Multiple schools in California have suffered from outbreaks of pertussis. In some cases there were not enough healthy teachers to keep the schools open. High numbers of absences proved a hardship for families who missed work and experienced lost wages, as well as threatening reimbursement based on average daily attendance.

How can my school get ready for the new Tdap requirement?

1. Inform parents now and throughout the 2010-2011 School Year

Students 10 years and older are recommended to be vaccinated with Tdap starting now to protect them against the ongoing threat of pertussis and to help meet the requirement in 2010-11 and beyond. Early and repeated informing of 6th-11th graders during 2010-2011 is vital to give families ample opportunity to meet the 2011-12 Tdap requirement and to avoid excluding students from entering school. Because so many students are affected by this new requirement, families should not wait until the summer to get their children immunized with Tdap.

2. Anticipate revising admissions procedures for 2011-2012

Stay tuned for information and training opportunities on how to meet the documentation requirement for the new Tdap law. In order to implement the new requirement during school admissions 2011, schools will want to update their admissions procedures during the 2010-2011 school year. This will require staff training.

3. Prepare parents of 6th Graders each year starting in 2011-2012

During school year 2012-2013 and beyond, the Tdap requirement will only apply to incoming 7th graders. During the 2011-12 school year, schools will want to start early to inform families of 6th graders about the 7th grade entry immunization requirements.

When should students get vaccinated with Tdap?

Students 10 years and older are recommended to be vaccinated with Tdap now. This will also help to meet the Tdap school requirements for the 2011-2012 school year and beyond. Schools should await updates on how to meet the Tdap reporting requirements for the 2011-2012 school year. Updates will be posted on the California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch website at www.getimmunizedca.org.

Will schools be able to access the immunization registry (CAIR) to view Tdap immunization records?

The Tdap reporting requirement documentation is scheduled to be available through CAIR by early 2011. Schools already using CAIR are able to check the records of students whose medical providers also use CAIR. Schools who do not already use CAIR can check with the regional CAIR office about the potential for becoming new users.

What if a student does not have proof of a Tdap booster shot before school starts?

School staff should exclude incoming 7th-12th graders who do not have proof of receiving a Tdap booster shot. Schools will need to follow up on each student until the requirement is met.

What if a student has had whooping cough recently or in the past?

The student will still need a Tdap booster shot to enter school. Immunity developed after whooping cough disease wears off, leaving students vulnerable to getting whooping cough again.

What about transfer students?

The requirements are the same. For the 2011-2012 school year only, all students entering or advancing into 7th through 12th grades will need proof of a Tdap booster shot before starting school.

What if a student has received a dose of Tdap before the 10 years of age?

CDPH recommends that children receive Tdap on or after their 10th birthday to provide protection throughout their adolescent years. However, a student will be considered to have met the new school requirement with proof of receipt of a dose of Tdap on or after their 7th birthday.

What exemptions are available under California law?

California School Immunization Law allows (a) parents/guardians to elect a personal belief exemption from immunization requirements if the immunization is contrary to his/her personal beliefs, and (b) physicians of children to provide medical exemptions (with a written statement) if the immunization is not indicated for the student. The law does not allow parents/guardians to elect an exemption simply because of convenience, such as when the immunization record is misplaced. Unimmunized students are at greater risk of catching these dangerous diseases and place the entire school community at greater risk for an outbreak. Schools should maintain an up-to-date list of students with exemptions, so they can be excluded quickly if an outbreak occurs.

Where can I go for more information?

There will be additional information and resources for schools in the coming months. For more information, go to www.getimmunizedca.org.