

Influenza Vaccine Requirement for School Attendance: Kindergarten through Grade 12

Updated December 22, 2020

Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, influenza vaccine will be required for all students. Influenza vaccine is always important to receive to reduce the risk of getting sick with influenza, reduce the severity of disease if one does get sick (including the risk of hospitalization) due to influenza, as well as preventing the spread of influenza to others. During the COVID-19 pandemic, influenza vaccine will be especially critical to reduce the overall impact of respiratory illness on the population, protect vulnerable populations from severe illness, and decrease the overall burden on the healthcare system.

Which students need to receive influenza vaccine?

Students in Kindergarten – Grade 12 will be required to receive influenza vaccine for the current influenza season for school attendance unless they have a medical or religious exemption.

When do students need to receive influenza vaccine?

Students must receive influenza vaccine for the current season (i.e., school year 2020-2021) by February 28, 2021. New students entering school before March 31, 2021 must have received a dose of vaccine for the current flu season for entry.

Are there any exemptions to receiving influenza vaccine?

Medical and religious exemptions are allowable in the state of Massachusetts. Medical exemptions must be renewed annually and include a statement from a physician stating that the vaccine is medically contraindicated for the student.

What type of influenza vaccine can students receive?

Any age-appropriate licensed influenza vaccine for the current season fulfills the requirement. This includes injectable and nasal spray vaccine types.

Should students without a documented dose of seasonal influenza vaccine be excluded from school on January 1st?

Enforcement of school immunization requirements is determined at the local level. We encourage school communities to work with families and healthcare providers to satisfy the requirements for students who are not compliant on January 1st. For the 2020-2021 school year **only**, influenza vaccine must be received by February 28, 2021. Post-secondary institutions are encouraged to work with families and healthcare providers to satisfy the vaccination requirements for students who are not compliant by March 1, 2021.

What about students who enroll after December 31?

Students who enroll before March 31 must have a documented dose of influenza vaccine for the current influenza season (along with all other required vaccinations) when they start school.

What about students who enroll later in the spring?

Students enrolling after March 31 are not required to have a dose of influenza vaccine for the current school year.

Will my school have to report on influenza vaccine in the Kindergarten and Grade 7 school immunization surveys?

Yes—the surveys will be open as usual during the fall to input information on other vaccines. By January 2021, a new section of the survey may be completed to report influenza vaccination rates for students enrolled in Kindergarten and Grade 7. We anticipate both parts of the survey, the traditional school immunization survey and the influenza component, will be due by the end of January 2021.

Will my school have to report the number of students who received influenza vaccine in the Grade 11 school immunization survey?

Yes—the Grade 11 survey will open in early 2021 and will include the influenza question with the survey. More information on the timeline for the Grade 11 survey will be available in the future.

Will my school have to report the number of students who received influenza vaccine for students in all grades?

While the influenza vaccine requirement exists for every grade, you will be asked to complete school immunization surveys for Kindergarten, Grade 7, and Grade 11.

Will influenza vaccine be required every year or just for the 2020-2021 school year?

Influenza vaccine is now a required vaccine for school attendance and will be required as of December 31 for all students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 each school year. For school year 2020-2021 only, seasonal influenza vaccine must be received by February 28, 2021.

Do younger students require 2 doses according to ACIP guidelines?

Children younger than 9 may need two doses of influenza vaccine depending on the number of influenza vaccines they have received in the past. Children should be vaccinated according to ACIP recommendations but only one dose of influenza vaccine is required for school attendance.

If my school will be providing instruction remotely, will students still need to meet immunization requirements?

The school immunization requirements, including the requirement for seasonal influenza vaccine, apply to all Massachusetts students enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 12, regardless of whether the district is providing instruction in-person, or using a hybrid or remote learning model.

Do the flu immunization requirements apply to students that are home schooled?

Immunization requirements, including the flu immunization requirement, do not apply to home schooled students unless the student will ever need to access the school building for sports, after school activities or any other reason.