FAQs FOR PARENTS (updated March 16)

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Tdap Requirement and Documentation

**What is the new pertussis booster requirement?**

- **For school year 2011-2012,** all students entering, advancing, transferring into 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grades will need proof of an adolescent whooping cough booster immunization (called “Tdap”) before entry into school in the fall.
- **For school year 2012-2013,** and all future school years, all students entering, advancing or transferring into 7th grade will need proof of a Tdap immunization

**What is Tdap and what are the diseases that the Tdap vaccine prevents?**

Tdap is a booster vaccine for older children, adolescents, and adults. It safely protects against 3 dangerous diseases: tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough (also called pertussis).

- **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. The symptoms can last for months. Whooping cough is particularly dangerous for young babies.
- **Tetanus** – causes a severe, painful tightening (spasms) of muscles, including of the jaw (‘lockjaw’), which can limit swallowing and breathing.
- **Diphtheria** – is a throat infection that can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure and death.
Do ALL 7th-12th grade students need to get the pertussis immunization?
Yes. For school year 2011 – 2012, all students going into 7th – 12th grades must have proof of having had the Tdap booster shot. This includes current students, new students and transfer students in both public and private schools. Many students have already received the vaccine and simply need to supply proof to the school, so check with your doctor or provider. Beginning the year after (2012 – 2013 school year and beyond), the law will only affect 7th graders. Limited exemptions are allowed.

Why is the Tdap vaccine required?
This new requirement will help protect your child and others in your school and community from whooping cough. Whooping cough is a serious disease that causes coughing fits that can last for months. In recent years, whooping cough has been increasing in the United States. In 2010, whooping cough was widespread in California and was responsible for 10 infant deaths.

Why does my child need Tdap?
In addition to it being a new requirement for starting school, children who get a Tdap booster shot will be better protected during their school years. Immunization also helps to protect others within the home, in the community, and at school. Immunizations help to prevent school closures. Many schools in California have suffered from outbreaks of whooping cough. Students got very sick and parents missed work and lost wages to care for their sick children. In some cases, schools had to close because there were not enough healthy teachers to keep schools open.

When should my child get vaccinated with Tdap?
Now, if your child hasn't already received it, because children can catch pertussis between now and the start of school. Avoid the rush and make sure your child is protected now and can start school on time. Make an appointment for your incoming 7th – 12th grader to get a Tdap booster shot now. Keep documentation of your child’s Tdap booster shot in a safe place. Your child will need proof of immunization in order to start school. Check with your school about how and when to submit the documentation.

What if my child had whooping cough recently or in the past?
Your child may still need a pertussis booster shot. Any protection (immunity) developed after having whooping cough disease wears off, leaving your child at risk for getting whooping cough again. A pertussis booster shot is needed to both protect your child in the future and to meet the school requirement. A Tdap dose administered on or after the 7th birthday will meet the new requirement.

What if my child does not have proof of a Tdap shot before school starts?
Your child may not start school. Any student who does not have proof of getting a Tdap booster shot will not be allowed to start school until proof of immunization is given to the school.

Should parents and others at home get the Tdap vaccine?
All persons 10 years and older are recommended to be vaccinated with Tdap to protect them against the ongoing threat of pertussis. Immunization also helps to protect close contacts, including young infants for whom pertussis is most severe and sometimes fatal.

How long do you have to wait after your last tetanus shot before getting Tdap?
According to state and national recommendations, the dose of Tdap required for the school law may be given at any time after the last tetanus shot.
How soon does the Tdap vaccine work?
Typically 1-2 weeks after the injection.

Diseases and Vaccines

What immunizations are required for my children to attend school?
Some, but not all, recommended childhood vaccines are required by California law and regulations in order to attend school. Under the California School Immunization Law (California Health and Safety Code, Sections 120325-120375), to protect the public’s health, children are required to receive certain immunizations in order to attend public and private elementary and secondary schools, child care centers, family day care homes, nursery schools, day nurseries and developmental centers. Immunizations required to enter Kindergarten: Polio, DTaP, MMR, Hepatitis B, and Varicella Immunization required to enter 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grade: Tdap (pertussis booster)

What is the “recommended” immunization schedule?
Pediatric immunization recommendations in the United States are developed by the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), typically in coordination with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).

What other immunizations should I consider for my child?
The recommended vaccine schedule for children may be found at www.getimmunizedca.org. In addition to routine baby shots, preteens and teens are also recommended to receive vaccine. Older children may need shots to prevent meningococcal disease (brain or blood infection), flu (influenza), HPV (human papillomavirus, a cause of cervical cancer), and any vaccine they may have missed during childhood. Talk with your healthcare provider for more information.

Where can my child get vaccinated?
Children should visit their regular doctor or health care provider to get their Tdap shot and other immunizations as soon as possible to avoid the back-to-school rush. The Vaccines for Children Program (VFC) offers free or low cost vaccines for eligible patients 18 years and younger. If your child/student is eligible for Medi-Cal, to find a VFC provider near you, please visit: http://www.eziz.org/pages/vfc_locations2.html or call 1-877-243-8832. For uninsured or underinsured patients, parents can find a list of federally qualified health centers in their area at http://www.oshpd.ca.gov/RHPC/Clinics/FQHCS.html. Some local health departments and pharmacies may also offer the Tdap vaccine and other immunizations. For more information, please contact your local health department.

Exemptions and Special Cases

Are immunization exemptions allowed under California law?
Yes, California law allows immunization exemptions. Exemptions to immunization should not be taken because of convenience. Unimmunized students are at greater risk of contracting diseases and spreading them to their families, schools and communities.

What exemptions are permitted by California law?
California law describes two exemptions to student immunization requirements:
- **Medical exemptions**: Physicians (MD or DO) may grant in writing an exemption for students for whom immunizations are not medically indicated, which occurs infrequently.

- **Personal beliefs exemptions (PBE)**: Parents or guardians
  - may request an exemption for their children from immunization requirements if the immunization is contrary to their personal beliefs, even if they have received other vaccines in the past;
  - seeking an exemption to the Tdap vaccine requirement because of personal beliefs should request an exemption.

Schools have a standardized affidavit form for parents and guardians requesting a personal beliefs exemption and retain a copy of a signed affidavit in the student’s file. As with other permanent records regarding student immunization, the school affidavit form is not to be sent home.