



STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM  
CORDELL HULL BUILDING, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR  
425 - 5TH AVENUE NORTH  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243

November 9, 2010

To: School officials, students and parents of students pursuing higher education in Tennessee

From: Kelly L. Moore, MD, MPH, Medical Director of the Tennessee Immunization Program

**Re: Immunization Requirements for New Full Time Students Enrolling in Higher Education Institutions in Tennessee**

On December 9, 2009, the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) made changes to immunization requirements for students entering higher education, effective for students enrolling in Tennessee institutions on or after July 1, 2011. These are the first changes to state immunization requirements in more than a decade and include updates to exempt distance learning students and address changing risks of disease.

Attached to this letter is a 1-page guide to the new rules. Because no changes were made to laws in the Tennessee Code concerning education of college students about meningitis, this topic is not addressed. TDH rules do not affect the ability of individual institutions to establish additional requirements. Prospective students should ask higher education institutions about their requirements.

Acceptable exemptions to TDH immunization requirements are medical (signed by a physician or health department) or religious (a statement that immunization conflicts with the student's religious beliefs or practices). Unlike child care and grade school, no specific TDH form is required. Institutions may use their own health forms for documentation of the required immunizations by a healthcare provider.

***New varicella (chickenpox) requirement explained:***

The primary change is a new requirement for proof of immunity to varicella virus (chickenpox) for all new full-time students born after 1979. Most students will be able to fulfill the requirement by simply having a healthcare provider report that they are immune because they have had chickenpox in the past. This virus is extremely contagious (it can linger in the air) and illness can be serious in a susceptible adult and/or the unborn child of a susceptible pregnant woman. A universal "rite of childhood" for those born before 1980, a vaccine was introduced in 1996: two doses of it are now recommended. Today, fewer than 50,000 cases are reported in the US each year. The vaccine prevents most illness, or makes it milder, but if exposed to someone with chickenpox, even vaccinated people who get mild illness can spread it to others.

The number of unvaccinated college students who were not exposed to chickenpox in childhood has grown as the disease has declined. The potential for outbreaks of chickenpox in classrooms and residential halls will continue to increase. During the late 1980s, US colleges experienced large outbreaks of measles and mumps due to insufficient immunization of students, resulting in the requirement for 2 doses of MMR vaccine; this new college entry requirement, already adopted in other states, is designed to reduce the risk of similarly dangerous and costly varicella outbreaks.

### ***Options for student access to vaccine***

Vaccination services are offered by health care providers and some student health centers. Students should be aware of ways to reduce the out of pocket costs to meet requirements:

- Health Insurance. Students with health insurance should check with their healthcare provider or insurer.
- Vaccines for Children Program. Each person younger than age 19 who has TennCare (Medicaid), *or* is uninsured, *or* is an American Indian or Alaskan Native, *or* whose insurance does not cover immunizations is entitled to federally funded vaccine through the federal VFC Program at any health department or participating medical clinic. Eligibility for this program ends on the 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Local Health Departments.
  - Any student younger than 19 can receive needed vaccines at local health departments at no cost for the vaccine. An administration fee may be charged.
  - Students aged 19 or older who have no proof of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccination may request vaccine at a local health department. An administration fee may be charged.
  - New students aged 19 or older *without insurance coverage* for vaccine who need varicella vaccine may request vaccine at local health departments. An administration fee may be charged.
  - Due to limited funds, federally funded hepatitis B vaccine is not currently available at health departments for health science students aged 19 or older. However, this vaccine is widely available in medical offices, some student health centers, and some pharmacies (with a prescription).
  - Blood tests to check for evidence of immunity are *not* available through health departments.

### ***Students who do not have all required immunizations***

The new TDH rules explicitly permit conditional enrollment after the first dose of each required vaccine, if a student does not have time to complete vaccination before enrollment. However, the institution is expected to take steps to ensure the student provides timely documentation of complete immunization (such as restricting class registration for the next semester or not releasing grades).

### ***For more information***

The TDH rules are online at <http://www.state.tn.us/sos/rules/1200/1200-14/1200-14.htm> (click on 1200-14-1, see rule 1200-14-1-.29). Information about new requirements also will be posted on the TDH websites (<http://health.state.tn.us/CEDS/required.htm> or <http://twis.tn.gov>). You may contact the Tennessee Immunization Program in the Communicable and Environmental Disease Services Section of TDH if you have questions concerning the regulations at (615)741-7247.

**Tennessee Department of Health Immunization Requirements for Students Enrolling in Higher Education Institutions in Tennessee after July 2011:**

*(Tennessee Department of Health Rule 1200-14-1-.29, revised December 2009)*

**Who is required to be immunized?**

- New **full time** enrollees in higher education institutions (post-secondary) in Tennessee with enrollments larger than 200 students.
    - New undergraduates enrolled in at least 12 semester hours, or equivalent
    - New graduate students enrolled in at least 9 semester hours, or equivalent
  - **Exempt:** full time distance learning students are exempted from immunization requirements
- Note:** *Institutions may have policies or requirements that go beyond state requirements.*

**Measles, mumps and rubella immunity:**

- Proof of immunity to measles, mumps and rubella may be provided by meeting one of the following 3 criteria:
  - Date of birth before 1957, *or*
  - Documentation of 2 doses vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella given at least 28 days apart, excluding doses given earlier than 4 days before the first birthday, *or*
  - Documentation of blood test (serology) showing immunity to measles, mumps **and** rubella. If any one of the three is negative, 2 doses of vaccine must be documented.

**Varicella (chickenpox) immunity:**

- Proof of immunity to varicella (chickenpox) is required by meeting one of the following 4 criteria:
  - Date of birth before 1980, *or*
  - History of chickenpox illness diagnosed by a healthcare provider or verified by a physician, advanced practice nurse or physician assistant to whom the illness is described, *or*
  - Documentation of 2 doses of varicella vaccine given at least 28 days apart, excluding doses given earlier than 4 days before the first birthday, *or*
  - Documentation of blood test (serology) showing immunity to varicella.

**Hepatitis B immunity (only for health science students expected to have patient contact):**

- Proof of immunity to hepatitis B for students in health sciences prior to patient care duties may be documented in one of the following ways:
  - Documentation of 3 doses of hepatitis B vaccine, *or*
  - Blood test (serology) showing immunity to hepatitis B virus (or infection)

**Valid exemptions to requirements:**

- **Medical:** Physician or health department indicates that certain vaccines are medically exempted (because of risk of harm). Any vaccines not exempted remain required.
- **Religious:** Requires a signed statement by the student that vaccination conflicts with his or her religious tenets or practices.

**Students who need 2 doses of vaccine, but cannot get both doses before classes start:** Such students may enroll with documentation of one dose of each required vaccine, but the institution should have a policy to require timely submission of proof of complete immunization. Such policies might include not releasing semester grades or not allowing course registration for the next semester until proof of complete immunization is provided.

**Location of immunization records:** Adults can have difficulty locating childhood immunization records. They should check with family members who may have copies of childhood records. They should try to contact the original immunization provider: if a local health department, contact them directly; if a private medical office, contact that office. Schools may have copies of immunization certificates in student files. Children born after the mid-1990s may have records entered in a state-managed immunization registry; such registries now exist in many states, but are unlikely to contain information on adults. If records cannot be located, vaccination is recommended – additional doses of vaccine are not harmful.

For more information: visit <http://twis.tn.gov> or <http://health.state.tn.us/CEDS/required.htm>.