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FAQ: Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis) School Immunization Requirement

- **What is the new Tdap requirement?**

All students entering, advancing, or transferring into seventh (7th) grade will need proof of the Tdap booster immunization before entry into school starting this coming August, the 2017-18 school year. This requirement applies to 7th grade students ONLY; grades 8-12 are NOT included in this rule change.

- **Why was the Tdap requirement added?**

The new immunization requirement is intended to reduce the spread of pertussis in Maine. In recent years Maine has seen a dramatic increase in the number of cases of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, throughout the state.

Prior to entering kindergarten, most children are fully protected against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis after receiving the DTaP vaccine in early childhood. However, immunity to these diseases wears off, leaving adolescents vulnerable once again. A booster dose of Tdap during adolescence helps to protect students and their close contacts, including young infants for whom pertussis is most severe.

- **Who is affected by the Tdap requirement?**

All public and private schools with enrolled 7th grade students are affected by the law.

- **What exemptions are available under Maine law?**

Maine law describes three exemptions for student immunization requirements. Schools should maintain an up-to-date list of students with exemptions so those students can be excluded quickly if an outbreak occurs.

- **Medical exemptions:** Physicians may grant in writing an exemption for students for whom immunizations are not medically indicated.
- **Religious:** You may request an exemption for children from immunization requirements if the immunization is contrary to your religious beliefs. The parent or guardian requesting an exemption needs to provide the school with a signed note stating the objection. Religious exemptions must be renewed annually.
- **Philosophical exemptions:** You may request an exemption for children from immunization requirements if the immunization is contrary to your personal beliefs. The parent or guardian requesting an exemption needs to provide the school with a signed note stating the objection. Philosophical exemptions must be renewed annually.

- **When should children get vaccinated with Tdap?**

Now. Avoid the rush and make sure your children can start school on time. Parents are encouraged to make an appointment for their incoming 7th grader to get a Tdap booster shot now. Children as young as 10 years old are recommended to get vaccinated with Tdap. This will protect them against the ongoing threat of pertussis and will meet the Tdap school requirement for when they are in 7th grade. Keep documentation of the child's Tdap booster shot. Children will need proof of immunization in order to start school.