



# Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in Schools

## Overview

### What are Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPDs)?

Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPDs) are diseases that can be prevented by vaccination. Of the numerous VPDs, those most commonly affecting schools are chickenpox, mumps, measles and pertussis (whooping cough).

### Why could students and staff be excluded from school?

Both students and staff could be excluded from school to prevent the spread of VPDs. Because a person can be contagious before they show signs or symptoms of disease, it is important to keep people who may be contagious out of school. Unvaccinated students and staff exposed to VPDs are more likely to be infected and contagious to others. Students and staff who have been exposed and cannot prove immunity may be excluded for up to 21 days or more from school, preschool or childcare because they could be contagious and a risk to others.

### When could exclusions be issued?

Each situation is different and depends on a number of conditions such as the type of VPD, when students and staff may have been exposed, and whether or not other preventive measures can be taken. When one or more cases of a VPD have been identified, public health officials make an exclusion determination based on the unique situation, and the most current Centers for Disease Control and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) guidelines available. The Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) issues disease control measures to prevent the spread of illness and the chances of a community-wide outbreak.

## Law

### What legal authority does public health have in responding to VPDs in schools?

The local public health jurisdiction has the authority to act in the best interests of public health under the Michigan Public Health Code [Act 368 of 1978](#). The OCDPH carefully considers the concerns of county residents and other affected community members whenever exercising its local public health authority. To help make informed decisions, the OCDPH relies on timely reporting of VPDs from physicians, laboratories, primary and secondary schools, child daycares and camps. For most VPDs, any occurrence or suspected occurrence of a case should be reported to public health within 24 hours. A list of diseases reportable by law can be found in the [MDHHS Communicable Disease Rules](#).

### What legal responsibilities do schools have when working with Public Health?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows for the disclosure of personally identifiable information in connection with a health or safety emergency to public health authorities without individual or parent authorization if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals under § 99.31(a)(10) and § 99.36 of the FERPA regulations.

## Roles

### What should parents do?

Parents should have their child's vaccines up-to-date. If a child cannot be vaccinated due to a medical condition, their physician will issue a medical waiver. Parents who elect to not vaccinate their child due to non-medical reasons are required by law to meet with a public health nurse before the OCDPH can issue a legal Michigan

waiver. Parents who waive vaccines should have a plan in place for childcare and any other educational needs in case their child must be excluded. Additionally, all parents must notify their child’s school if their child is sick and be as specific as possible (e.g., influenza-like illness, stomach virus, chickenpox, etc.), so that schools can report to the health department in a timely manner.

### What should schools do?

Schools need to ensure that students and staff have documentation of immunity, are up-to-date on their required immunizations or have a valid waiver prior to starting school. Schools should also remind parents at the beginning of the school year that if a parent signed a waiver to opt out of one or more vaccines, they should have a plan in place in case their child must be excluded. Schools need to be familiar with and follow the MDHHS [Managing Communicable Diseases in Schools manual](#), which provides information on VPDs, reporting diseases, school exclusions and closures and other disease information and resources. In an outbreak response, the school should designate a point person to communicate with the local public health department, public and media (if necessary). Schools should notify local public health if excluded students or staff return to school before the period of exclusion ends.

### What does local public health do?

Local public health works to protect and promote the health of the community by carrying out the powers and duties as defined in the Michigan Public Health Code [Act 368 of 1978](#). This includes, but is not limited to, collecting and monitoring health data to identify health threats, investigating health hazards, educating people about health issues, mobilizing community partnerships to solve health problems, developing policies that support health, enforcing laws and regulations that protect health and linking people to health services. When parents seek a Michigan vaccine waiver for their child, local public health provides VPD education, discusses the associated risks of not vaccinating, along with possible school exclusion, and addresses concerns parents may have about vaccines and the diseases they prevent. Local public health develops relationships with school administration staff so cases of reportable diseases in schools can be handled smoothly. Local public health also issues a letter(s) to schools for use in notifying parents of a situation and any actions that may be required. In situations of potential community-wide exposure and/or a need for clarification to the public, local public health may issue a news release.

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