

# Minnesota's College Immunization Law

## What you need to know about the College Immunization Law

When you enroll in college in Minnesota, be prepared to show proof that you've been vaccinated against these five diseases or have a legal exemption: measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, and diphtheria.

The Minnesota College Immunization Law applies to anyone who was born after 1956. However, students who graduated from a Minnesota high school in 1997 or later are exempt from these requirements (because they will already have met them).

## Information about vaccine-preventable diseases

**Measles** is very contagious and can be very serious. Symptoms include high fever and rash. It can cause life-threatening pneumonia, brain swelling, middle-ear infections, severe diarrhea, and seizures. The risk of death from measles is higher in adults than in children.

**Mumps** causes swelling of the glands behind the jaw. It can cause hearing loss, and about one out of four teenage or adult men who have mumps may experience swelling of the testicles. In rare cases, it can cause sterility.

**Rubella** is another disease that has a rash. It is usually a mild disease in children, but if a pregnant woman gets rubella, it can cause serious birth defects including glaucoma, cataracts, deafness, and mental retardation.

**Tetanus** or "lockjaw" can cause muscle spasms so severe that a person may stop breathing. The tetanus germ is commonly found in dirt. Wounds, small burns, or scratches can be a source of infection, and deep puncture wounds are especially dangerous.

**Diphtheria** is a serious bacterial disease that can lead to breathing problems, heart failure, and sometimes death.

**Human Papillomavirus (HPV)** is very common and spreads through sexual activity. In most cases, HPV goes away on its own, but it can cause health

problems like genital warts and cervical and other cancers. All boys and girls are recommended to get vaccinated starting at age 11-12 years old; however, older teens and young adults should still catch up on this vaccine. Talk to your health care provider.

**Meningococcal** disease is a serious illness caused by bacteria. It causes meningitis, an infection of the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. It can also cause blood infections. Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but college students living in dorms or close quarters are at increased risk. There are two different vaccines that protect against meningococcal disease.

## Information about hepatitis A, B and C

**Hepatitis A** is an infection in the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus. It is spread by close contact with an infected person or by eating/drinking contaminated food and water. Symptoms include severe nausea, tiredness and weakness, and yellowing of the skin and eyes. Symptoms are more severe in adults than in children. Symptoms may last for several weeks resulting in missed school and work. There is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis A.

**Hepatitis B** is an infection in the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B infection can be life-long and can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. Hepatitis B virus is easily spread through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids, including sexual contact. Many people do not have symptoms until many years later.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B infection. Treatment may help in later stages of chronic illness but cannot help when the initial infection occurs.

**Hepatitis C** is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis C virus. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives.

*There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.* Like hepatitis B there is treatment available to help in later stages of chronic illness.

## Should I still get hepatitis A and B, HPV and meningococcal shots if they're not required?

Yes.

- The meningococcal ACWY vaccine is recommended for all persons through age 21 years. Also, talk to your health care provider about the meningococcal B vaccine.
- Hepatitis B is highly contagious, and the highest rate of disease occurs in persons age 20-45 years. This vaccine is recommended for all infants so it is possible you have already received this vaccine. If you will be going into a health care profession, your employer will probably require that you show proof of vaccination.
- Hepatitis A is still common in the U.S. and traveling outside of the U.S. is a risk factor for getting hepatitis A infection.
- HPV is very common. Getting vaccinated offers protection against cancer and genital warts.
- If you will be **traveling internationally**, it's likely you'll need even more shots. Talk to your health care provider.

## What do I have to do?

Under Minnesota law, you have to submit an immunization record to your college or meet one of the legal exemptions (see below). You might be automatically exempt if you graduated from high school in Minnesota since 1997 or you were previously enrolled in another college in Minnesota.

## Are there other legal exemptions?

Yes. You don't have to get a vaccine if you are already immune to the disease it prevents. For combination vaccines, like MMR vaccine, you would need to get it if you had measles, but not mumps or rubella.

Your doctor can sign an exemption if you have a medical reason not to be vaccinated.

You can get a non-medical exemption if you object to an immunization. You will need to submit a notarized statement that your conscientiously held beliefs prevent you from getting the vaccines you specify.

## What if I can't find my shot record?

- Try to remember where you were immunized and see if your doctor or clinic still has the records.
- If you attended school in Minnesota (before college) your former school district may have your records.
- If you grew up in Minnesota, you can call the Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) at 651-201-5207 or 1-800-657-3970 to request your immunization record.
- If you still can't find your records, you'll probably have to repeat the shots and start a new record.

## Are the shots safe?

The vaccines are safe and effective. There can be mild side effects (e.g., slight fever, sore arm). It's very rare for more severe side effects to occur. If you are unimmunized, your chances of becoming ill and suffering serious complications are much higher. Extra doses usually do not increase the chance of side effects.

## Where can I get the shots?

Your health care provider can give you the shots you need. If you don't have a health care provider, or don't have health insurance, you may be able to get free or low-cost shots. If you're 18 years of age or younger, you may qualify for the Minnesota Vaccines for Children Program. If you're 19 years of age or older, you may qualify for the Uninsured and Underinsured Adult Vaccine program. Go to Vaccine **Clinic Look-Up** ([www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/vaxfinder.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/vaxfinder.html)) for more information. Your local public health agency may be able to direct you to services. Your college may also offer the shots through the health service or a special immunization clinic.

## Minnesota Department of Health Immunization Program

PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164 651-201-5503  
[www.health.state.mn.us/immunize](http://www.health.state.mn.us/immunize)

*To obtain this information in a different format,  
call: 651-201-5503.*