

AB 354: The New 7th – 12th Grade California Immunization Law
California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch

What PARENTS Need To Know
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the new Tdap requirement for 7th – 12th graders?

Starting July 2011, a new law (AB 354) changing California immunization requirements for all students entering 7th-12th grades goes into effect. The law requires:

- This coming school year (2011-2012), all students entering into 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grades will need proof of an adolescent whooping cough booster shot (called "Tdap") before starting school.
- For the next school year (2012-13) and future school years, all students entering into 7th grade only will need proof of a Tdap shot to start school.

Do ALL 7th – 12th grade students need to get the "Tdap" shot?

Yes. For this coming school year (2011 – 2012 school year), all students going into 7th – 12th grades must have proof of having had the Tdap booster shot before starting school. This includes current students, new students and transfer students in both public and private schools. Beginning the year after (2012 – 2013 school year), the law will only affect 7th graders. Limited exemptions are allowed.

What is Tdap?

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).

Why was the Tdap requirement added?

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. It can be deadly for infants. In recent years, whooping cough has been increasing in the United States. In 2010, whooping cough was widespread in California.

What are the diseases tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough (pertussis)?

- *Tetanus* – (also called lockjaw) causes painful tightening of the muscles. It can lead to "locking" of the jaw so the person cannot open his/her mouth or swallow.
- *Diphtheria* – is a throat infection that can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure and death.
- *Whooping cough* – (also called pertussis) 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. Symptoms can last for months. Whooping cough is very dangerous for young babies.

When should my child get vaccinated?

Now. A large number of students need a Tdap shot before the start of school next year. Avoid the rush and make sure your child can start school on time. Make an appointment for your incoming 7th – 12th 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 whooping cough and will meet the Tdap school requirement for when they are in 7th grade.

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.

What if my child has had whooping cough recently or in the past?

Your child will still need a Tdap booster shot. Immunity developed after having whooping cough disease wears off, leaving your child at risk for getting whooping cough again. A Tdap booster shot is needed to both protect your child in the future and to meet the school requirement.

Why should my child get vaccinated?

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.

Where can my child get vaccinated?

Children should visit their regular doctor or health care provider to get their Tdap shot. Children 18 years old and younger who are uninsured or underinsured may qualify for the Vaccines for Children Program. To find a provider near you, call 1-877-243-8832 or visit: www.eziz.org/pages/vfc_locations2.html. Some local pharmacies and Health Departments may also offer the Tdap vaccine.

What if my child does not have proof of a Tdap shot before school starts?

He/She 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.

Are immunization exemptions allowed under California law?

The same exemptions for children entering kindergarten apply.

What if my child has received a Tdap booster shot before 10 years of age?

Your child will be considered to have met the new school requirement with proof of getting a dose of Tdap on or after their 7th birthday. However, we recommend that children receive Tdap on or after their 10th birthday to provide better protection throughout their adolescent years.

What other immunizations should I consider for my child?

Preteens and teens are also recommended to receive vaccines against 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. The recommended vaccine schedule may be found at www.getimmunized.ca.gov. Talk with your healthcare provider for more information.

Should parents and others at home get the Tdap vaccine?

All persons 10 years and older are recommended to be vaccinated with Tdap now if they haven't done so 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.

Where can I go for more information?

For more information, visit the California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch website at www.getimmunizedca.org.