

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**Immunization Exemptions and  
Vaccine Preventable Disease Exclusion Guidelines in School Settings**

There are two situations in which children who are not appropriately immunized may be admitted to school:

- 1) a **medical exemption** is allowed if a physician submits documentation that an immunization is medically contraindicated; and
- 2) a **religious exemption** is allowed if a parent or guardian submits a written statement that immunizations conflict with their sincere religious beliefs.

Philosophical exemptions are **not** allowed by law in Massachusetts, even if signed by a physician. Only medical and religious exemptions are acceptable. These exemptions must be kept in the students' files at school (105 CMR 220.000 and M.G.L. c.76, ss. 15 and 15C).

While the laws and regulations state that **unimmunized** children who do not meet criteria for medical or religious exemption "shall **not** be admitted to school," policies around enforcement of exclusion for unimmunized or partially immunized children are developed by individual schools/school districts.

In situations when one or more cases of disease are present in a school, all susceptibles, **including those with medical or religious exemptions**, are subject to exclusion as described in the Reportable Diseases and Isolation and Quarantine Requirements (105 CMR 300.000).

The reporting and control of diseases identified as posing a risk to the public health is prescribed by State regulation and law. The Isolation and Quarantine Requirements establish isolation and quarantine requirements for cases of certain diseases and their contacts in certain high risk situations, including the school setting. The following table outlines several of the more common childhood vaccine-preventable diseases identified in the requirements that may occur in schools and the corresponding exclusion requirements.

(Cont)

## Guidelines for Select Vaccine Preventable Diseases in a School Setting

<b>Disease</b>	<b>Case</b>	<b>Symptomatic Contact</b>	<b>Asymptomatic Contact</b>
<b>Measles</b>	Student/staff should not return until 4 days after rash onset. (Count the day of rash onset as day zero.)	Same as for a case. Obtain a blood sample for confirmation, drawn $\geq 3$ days after rash onset. (Count the day of rash onset as day zero.)	If one case of measles: exclude susceptibles <sup>1</sup> from day 5 through 18 after last exposure. If multiple cases: exclude susceptibles <sup>1</sup> for 14 days after the date of rash onset in the last case.
<b>Mumps</b>	Exclude student/staff until 9 days after onset of gland swelling. (Count the day of swelling onset as day zero.)	Same as for a case. Obtain an acute blood sample for confirmation, drawn as soon as possible after onset of symptoms and a convalescent blood sample drawn 14 days after the acute. (Count the day of swelling onset as day zero.)	If one case of mumps: exclude susceptibles <sup>2</sup> from day 12 through 26 after last exposure. If multiple cases: exclude susceptibles <sup>2</sup> for 26 days after the onset of the last case.
<b>Rubella</b>	Exclude student/staff for 7 days after rash onset. (Count the day of rash onset as day zero.)	Same as for a case. Obtain a blood sample for confirmation, drawn $\geq 3$ days after rash onset. (Count the day of rash onset as day zero.)	If one case of rubella: exclude susceptibles <sup>3</sup> from day 7 through 21 after last exposure. If multiple cases: exclude susceptibles <sup>3</sup> for 21 days after the date of rash onset in the last case.
<b>Pertussis</b>	Exclude student/staff until 3 weeks after cough onset or after completing 5 days of a 14 day course of the appropriate antibiotics.	Same as for a case. Obtain a culture if it is $< 2$ weeks after the cough onset. Obtain an SLI serology if the patient is $\geq 11$ years old and it is 2-8 weeks after the cough onset.	Do not exclude after starting appropriate antibiotics. Any susceptible <sup>4</sup> contacts not undergoing antibiotic prophylaxis must be excluded until 21 days after the onset of the last case. In addition to antibiotic prophylaxis, contacts that are $< 7$ years of age who are under-immunized should have immunization initiated or continued depending on their past history.
<b>Varicella</b>	Exclude until all lesions have dried and crusted over, or until no new lesions appear, usually by the 5 <sup>th</sup> day after rash onset. (Count the day of rash onset as day zero.)	Same as for a case.	No restrictions except for neonates and health care workers.

## Definition of Susceptibles

- <sup>1</sup> **Measles** - Susceptibles include all those born in or after 1957 without documentation of at least two doses of measles-containing vaccine or serologic evidence of immunity. In an outbreak situation, all those with 0 or 1 dose may avoid exclusion if they promptly receive a *new* dose. Those born before 1957 are considered immune.
- <sup>2</sup> **Mumps** - Susceptibles include all those born in or after 1957 without written documentation of one dose of mumps-containing vaccine or serologic evidence of immunity. In an outbreak situation, all those with no doses may avoid exclusion if they promptly receive a *first* dose. Those born before 1957 are considered immune.
- <sup>3</sup> **Rubella** - Susceptibles include all those born in or after 1957 without written documentation of one dose of rubella-containing vaccine or serologic evidence of immunity. In an outbreak situation, all those with no doses may avoid exclusion if they promptly receive a *first* dose. Those born before 1957 are considered immune.
- <sup>4</sup> **Pertussis** - Susceptibles include all those exposed, regardless of their age, immunization status, or past history of disease.
- <sup>5</sup> **Varicella** - Susceptibles include all those, regardless of age, without 1) written documentation of one or two doses of varicella vaccine or 2) a physician-certified reliable history of chickenpox disease or 3) serologic evidence of immunity.

There are three additional references that may be helpful to school health personnel: 1) the *Guide to Surveillance and Reporting* can be obtained by calling the Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) at (617) 983-6800 or on the MDPH Website at <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/>; 2) the *Comprehensive School Health Manual* can be obtained by writing to the State House Bookstore, Room 116, Boston, MA 02133 or calling (617) 727-2834; and 3) the *Health and Safety in Child Care Manual* can be obtained by writing to the State House Bookstore, Room 116, Boston, MA 02133 or calling (617) 727-2834.