



Frequently Asked Questions for Parents: New Chickenpox Vaccine Requirement for High School Students

General Questions

1. Q: What is the new chickenpox (chickenpox) vaccine requirement?

A: All 9th-12th graders are required to have 2 doses of chickenpox vaccine to attend school in the fall of 2016. Students in kindergarten-8th grade have already been required to get 2 doses of chickenpox vaccine.

2. Q: Why is it important for teens to get chickenpox vaccine? Chickenpox is such a mild illness.

A: Chickenpox may be mild or moderate for many. However, it can lead to life-threatening complications for some people, even if they were healthy before they got sick. Pneumonia, inflammation of the brain, bacterial infection, and death can occur in children and adults because of chickenpox disease. Before chickenpox vaccine was available, there were 4 million cases of chickenpox each year in the U.S., and thousands required hospitalization. The disease is more severe in adolescents, adults, and those with weakened immune systems. There are also more reported cases in older children and adolescents because they are not as well immunized.

3. Q: Why are high school students now required to get chickenpox vaccine?

A: In 2007, a national group of medical experts recommended that all children get 2 doses of chickenpox vaccine. Washington State implemented the requirement for 2 doses of chickenpox vaccine in 2008, starting with kindergarteners. The requirement then moved up a grade each year. In 2014, the State Board of Health, which develops immunization rules in our state, made a decision to apply the requirement to kindergarten-12th grade by school year 2016-17 to be in compliance with the federal recommendations.

4. Q: Why are 2 doses of chickenpox vaccine needed?

A: Even though one dose is very effective, a second dose helps give long lasting protection against the disease. The second dose is also 95 to 100 percent effective against severe disease. Children who are vaccinated but become infected will be sick for a shorter amount of time, and with a milder case than if they had not been vaccinated.

5. Q: If I've already submitted a Certificate of Exemption, does my child still need to get the vaccine?

A: No, your child would be in compliance with the requirement and does not need varicella vaccine.

History of Chickenpox Disease

6. Q: If my child had a blood test to check for chickenpox immunity, what should I give to the school?

A: Ask a healthcare provider to sign the [Certificate of Immunization Status](#) (CIS) on the right hand side. Give the signed CIS and a copy of the signed lab report to the school.

7. Q: If my high school student had chickenpox as a child, does he still need to get the vaccine?

A: No. If a student already had chickenpox, then he or she doesn't need to get the vaccine. Please make sure the health care provider confirms the student had chickenpox disease by filling out the CIS or providing a letter to the school.

8. Q: This year or in the fall, can parents report to high schools that their student had chickenpox in the past?

A: No. Parents had to let school staff know **before or during school year 2013-2014** about their child's history of chickenpox. Parents can no longer let a high school know about previous chickenpox disease. Parents must now get their health care provider to verify that their student had chickenpox disease. Providers can verify this information by filling out the [Certificate of Immunization Status](#) or by providing a letter to parents to give school staff.

9. Q: If my child is in grade school this year, can I let the school know that he had chickenpox in the past?

A: No. Grade schools can't accept parent-provided information about a history of chickenpox for this or next school year. The national guidelines recommend that only healthcare providers verify a child had chickenpox disease. Since fewer children are getting disease, it may be difficult for parents to know if their child had chickenpox or another illness.

10. Q: If a provider isn't willing to verify history of chickenpox disease, what options do we have?

A: A child can get 2 doses of vaccine, get a blood test to check for immunity, or get an exemption.

11. Q: If a provider didn't see a child when he was sick with chickenpox, how will I get the provider to verify disease?

A: Talk with the provider. He or she may be willing to help verify disease based on a link with multiple cases of chickenpox at that time. The provider may also recommend that the child get vaccinated or get a blood test to check for immunity.

12. Q: What documentation is required from the provider to verify chickenpox disease so my child can attend school?

A: A provider can verify chickenpox disease by:

- Filling out box 2 on the right hand side of the Certificate of Immunization Status, **OR**
- Providing a letter that indicates the student has a history of chickenpox disease.

13. Q: We recently moved from another state. My 10th grader had chickenpox disease in the past. Can the school accept my information, or do I need to get a provider to verify the disease?

A: All new students from outside Washington State must have a provider verify history of disease. Parent documentation is not allowed for new students from out of state.

14. Q: My high school student moved from one school district to another school district. Can I let the school know that my child had chickenpox in the past?

A: No. Parents had to let school staff know **before or during school year 2013-2014** about a history of chickenpox. Parents can no longer let a high school know about previous chickenpox disease, even if the student moved from another school or school district.