

# Immunization of School Pupils Act

## Information for School Principals

### What is the Immunization of School Pupils Act R.S.O. 1990 (ISPA)?

ISPA is the Ontario law that requires students attending public or private schools to have up-to-date vaccinations or a valid statement of exemption for medical reasons or reasons of conscience or religious belief. Under ISPA legislation, students can be suspended from school if they do not have required vaccination for (diphtheria, polio, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, and meningococcal disease). Students born after January 1, 2010, are also required to have vaccination against varicella (chicken pox).

Ontario law requires public health agencies to keep and assess vaccination records for all students under 18 years of age. ISPA protects children from vaccine preventable diseases and reduces the risk of disease outbreaks in schools.

Students for whom Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) does not have up to date immunization records or valid exemption will be temporarily suspended from school until the required records are provided to public health.

- The Medical Officer of Health will issue the order requiring the school operator to suspend the student.
- The school operator must enforce the order and suspend the student.

### Who is responsible for reporting immunization to Northwestern Health Unit?

It is the parents'/guardians' responsibility to report their child's immunizations to Northwestern Health Unit. Although some health care providers' offices do report children's immunizations to us, they are not mandated to do so.

#### Parents/Guardians should:

- Check with their health care provider to ensure their child's immunization record is up to date.
- Provide an updated record to the NWHU local office.

### Where can students get vaccinated?

#### To receive vaccines required for school students can:

- Attend a vaccination clinic planned at their school.
- Make an appointment to be vaccinated by their doctor/health care provider.
- Make an appointment at their Northwestern Health Unit office.
- Students wanting to receive a vaccine who are capable of understanding the benefits and risks can be vaccinated without parental consent.

### How do parents/guardians obtain an exemption for their student?

Parents/guardians who have made the decision not to immunize their child can contact NWHU for assistance with the exemption process.

Statement of medical exemption forms must be filled out and signed by the student's physician/health care provider and returned to their local NWHU office.

#### To obtain an exemption for reasons of conscience or religious belief parents/guardians must:

- Complete an education session that covers basic information about immunization, vaccine safety, immunization and community health and immunization law in Ontario.
- Get a Statement of Conscience or Religious Belief affidavit notarized.
- Provide the NWHU with the original copy of the signed affidavit and certificate of completion for the education session.

### What does it mean to "lift" a student from the suspension list?

Temporary "lifts" can be given to students to allow school attendance during the suspension period by NWHU.

Public health nurses could allow a temporary "lift" for students for reasons such as medical, exemption in process, appointment for vaccination booked after the suspension date, etc. These "lifts" are granted following discussion with the parent or guardian of the student and on a case-by-case basis.

## What are the school responsibilities for implementing ISPA student suspension?

- Ensure mailing addresses of all students are kept current for STIX downloads.
- Direct parents/legal guardians/students over 16 years of age to contact their local health unit for instructions on how to submit an immunization record.
- Direct parents/guardians to contact their NWHU local office to arrange an appointment for vaccination or to obtain an exemption.
- Facilitate the delivery and promotion of school-based immunization clinics.
- Receive the Order for Suspension from NWHU and keep them until the active suspension period is over. File the Order for Suspension according to your Board's record retention policy.

### On the first day of active suspension (over the telephone):

- Review the list of suspended students with the public health nurse.
- Inform the student or their parent/guardian they are suspended under the requirements of the ISPA.
- Provide a photocopy of the Order for Suspension to students, if needed. Inform them that a copy of the order was sent to them by mail from NWHU.

### Advise suspended students or their parents/guardians that:

- They may return to school as soon as the requested immunization information or a valid exemption form is received, reviewed, and approved by the Northwestern Health Unit.
- The suspension may last for up to 20 school days if the required information is not received.
- Students will not be allowed to attend class or any school function during the suspended period.

### During the active suspension period:

- Review the list of suspended students daily with the public health nurse.
- Ensure that suspended students on the list are not in attendance without approval from NWHU.

### When will schools be made aware of upcoming suspension dates?

Your school will receive suspension timelines at the beginning of the school year.

## What are NWHU responsibilities under ISPA?

Northwestern Health Unit assesses all vaccination records of all students attending school under ISPA requirements. Notices will be sent home for all students who are not up to date with the required immunizations, either by mail or through the school. Parents/guardians/students over 16 years of age will receive up to two letters from the NWHU in advance of the suspension date. Sample copies have been included within this correspondence package.

- In compliance with the ISPA, the original Order for Suspension will be mailed or delivered in person to the school principal as the "school operator".
- A copy of this order is mailed to the parent or legal guardian along with the final notice two weeks in advance of the suspension date.

ISPA assessment will include both in class and virtual learners. All students who are enrolled in school are required to be in compliance with ISPA. In class learners will be subject to suspension if their record of immunization is incomplete. Virtual learners are still required to receive necessary vaccines; however, a suspension will not be executed.

## Where can schools direct parents/guardians' questions?

Question can be sent to the NWHU via email at [vaccines@nwhu.on.ca](mailto:vaccines@nwhu.on.ca) or by calling the local health unit office in your community.

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