

Information for Parents: New Tdap Vaccine Requirement For Students Entering 7th Grade for the 2011-12 School Year

A new requirement has been added to Oklahoma's school immunization requirements. All students entering the seventh grade beginning with the 2011-2012 school year will be required to have one dose of Tdap vaccine. The following information should help to answer your questions about the new requirement.

Q: What is Tdap vaccine?

A: Tdap is a vaccine used to boost immunity to pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, and diphtheria. A dose of Tdap is recommended for all adolescents at age 11-12 years because protection provided by the DTaP shots they received as children wears off after 5 to 10 years.

Q: What is whooping cough?

A: Whooping cough, or pertussis, is an illness that causes coughing fits so intense and rapid that patients have difficulty breathing. The lack of oxygen to the brain during coughing fits may lead to brain damage, especially in babies.

Although whooping cough is usually a mild disease in adolescents, it can be serious for people of any age. Whooping cough can place a significant burden on families, as a person with whooping cough may be asked to stay home from work or school for at least 5 days while taking antibiotic treatment so they won't spread the disease to others. Most deaths occur in babies who are too young to be fully vaccinated.

Q: Why do we need a Tdap requirement?

A: We need a Tdap requirement for 3 main reasons:

- Immunity to whooping cough wears off over time. Preteens, teenagers, and adults are at risk for whooping cough, tetanus, and diphtheria 5 to 10 years after their last DTaP shot.
- Whooping cough has been increasing in the United States especially among teens (10–19 years of age) and babies younger than 6 months of age. In 2010, several states reported an increase in whooping cough cases including a statewide epidemic in California.
 - California reported over 7,000 cases of whooping cough and 10 deaths in babies in 2010.
 - Texas reported more than 2,000 cases.
- High immunization levels will help prevent an increase in the number of cases of whooping cough in Oklahoma.

Q: What is the deadline for students to get the Tdap vaccine?

A: Oklahoma's school law states that Tdap is required for all students attending the 7th grade beginning with the fall 2011 semester, so the deadline is the first day of school of the 2011-2012 school year.

Q: If my child already had whooping cough, should he or she still get the Tdap vaccine?

A: Yes, adolescents who have had whooping cough should receive Tdap according to the routine recommendations because individuals can contract the disease again. The length of protection, or immunity, provided by the disease is unknown. Having had the disease is not an exception to the Tdap requirement.

Q: Where can I get the Tdap vaccine for my child?

A: Tdap vaccine is available in most doctor's offices, clinics, and county health departments. Be sure to get a copy of the vaccination record to take to your child's school and for your records.

Q: Does Tdap vaccine contain thimerosal?

A: No. There are two brands of Tdap vaccine on the market, Boostrix® and ADACEL® and neither of these vaccines contains thimerosal.

Q: Does Tdap vaccine cause any reactions?

A: Yes, the most common reactions following Tdap are pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site. Other problems reported after Tdap vaccination include: tiredness, fever, headaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomachache. No severe problems following Tdap vaccination were seen in adolescents when the vaccine was tested before it was licensed.

Q: How do the vaccine side effects compare to the effects of the diseases?

A: Compared to the vaccine, the effects of the diseases are much more severe, even including death.

These are some of the problems caused by tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis diseases:

Tetanus

- Lockjaw (spasms of the jaw muscles) which can lead to trouble breathing
- Respiratory failure
- Heart failure
- Prolonged, painful spasms of the major muscles of the body which can lead to fractures of the spine or leg and arm bones
- Acute kidney failure
- Coma
- Death: 11 out of every 100 reported cases

Whooping cough

- Pneumonia
- Seizures
- Permanent brain damage
- Death: 2 out of every 1,000 reported cases

Diphtheria

- Myocarditis (inflammation of the heart which can cause heart failure)
- Airway obstruction
- Death: 5 to 10 out of every 100 people with diphtheria die from it

Q: If a student has received the 5 dose series of DTaP, does he or she still need to have a dose of Tdap before entering 7th grade?

A: Yes, the student must receive a booster dose of Tdap to be in compliance with Oklahoma immunization requirements.

Q: Are exemptions to Tdap allowed?

A: Yes, exemptions to the Tdap requirement are allowed for medical, religious or personal reasons. Schools have a supply of exemption certificates for parents who request them.

Q: What are the medical reasons for not giving a dose of Tdap?

A: People who should not receive Tdap for medical reasons include people of any age who have:

- Ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a dose of DTaP, DTP, DT, or Td,
- Experienced a coma, or long or multiple seizures within 7 days after receiving a dose of DTaP or DTP vaccine unless a cause other than the vaccine was found.

Q: How can I get more information about the Tdap vaccine and the new requirement?

A: For MORE information, visit the Immunization Service web page at:

http://www.ok.gov/health/Disease_Prevention_Preparedness/Immunizations/ , call the Immunization Service at 1-800-234-6196 or 405-2714073 or ask your regular doctor, nurse or medical clinic.