



Bulletin No. 8

May 2, 2000

Proposed Revision of Immunization Requirements
for Schools and Childcare Facilities

What is being proposed?

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and Department of Health and Social Services are planning to revise the existing immunization regulations for students attending Alaska schools and childcare facilities. In addition to the currently required vaccinations (i.e., diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, rubella, and polio), the following age-appropriate immunizations will be required for entry/attendance:

Immunizations to be Added

	Schools (K-12)	Childcare Facilities
Mumps*	✓	✓
Hepatitis A	✓	✓
Hepatitis B	✓	✓
Hib**		✓
Varicella***		✓

* Mumps immunization will be added to the required vaccine list. Most Alaska children already are protected against mumps through receipt of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine.

** Hib = *Haemophilus influenzae* type b

*** Varicella = "chickenpox"

The school regulation change would apply to all students attending public or private schools in kindergarten through 12th grades. The childcare facility regulation change would apply to children attending licensed childcare facilities in Alaska.

Would all Alaska children need new immunizations?

No. Many children in Alaska already have received these immunizations, as they have been recommended for several years. Even though varicella vaccine is a relative newcomer, many children already have had chickenpox and/or have been vaccinated against chickenpox. Only children who have neither been vaccinated against chickenpox nor ever had chickenpox disease would need to be immunized against chickenpox.

When would the new requirements take effect?

The requirements would take effect after July 1, 2001. This should allow parents and health care providers sufficient time to ensure children receive needed vaccines.

What if a family can't afford the required vaccines?

These and other childhood vaccines are provided to all Alaska children at little or no cost. Immunizations may be obtained at any Alaska Public Health Center or through Native health facilities at no charge. Services within the private medical community may involve a nominal charge to cover administrative expenses, but the vaccines themselves are free.

Why is this change in the requirements being proposed?

The proposed new requirements reflect current medical recommendations. Immunization against the listed diseases is important for the continued health of Alaska's children.

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease spread by close personal contact with an infected person and sometimes by eating food/drinking water contaminated with the hepatitis A virus. Large outbreaks of hepatitis A have occurred in Alaska in periodic cycles (usually every 7-10 years), largely among children less than 15 years of age. Over the past 10 years, hepatitis A outbreaks in Alaska have resulted in over 3,000 cases and at least 4 deaths.

Hepatitis B, which also affects the liver, is spread through contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person. Hepatitis B virus can cause short-term (acute) illness that leads to loss of appetite, tiredness, diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice (yellow skin or eyes) and pain in muscles, joints, and the stomach. About 10% of infected persons develop long-term (chronic) infection, which is associated with serious complications such as cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver failure, liver cancer, and death. Alaska has a long history of hepatitis B vaccination and prevention efforts.

Hib disease is a serious bacterial illness that usually strikes children under 5 years of age. The bacteria can be spread from person to person, often by persons who don't know they have the bacteria. Before Hib vaccine was available, Hib disease was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children under 5 years old in the U.S., and an average 29 cases and 2 deaths were reported in Alaska each year. After the vaccine became routinely available, less than 5 cases (average) were reported each year. *Currently, Alaska is the only U.S. state that does not require Hib vaccine for childcare attendance.*

Varicella (chickenpox) is a common childhood disease that is easily spread from person to person and through airborne droplets. Chickenpox can lead to skin infection, scars, pneumonia, brain damage, or death. About 100 people die each year in the United States as a result of chickenpox. In 1997, an Alaska child died from complications of this illness.

Mumps is an acute viral disease characterized by fever, swelling and tenderness of one or more salivary glands. Complications from mumps can include meningitis, testicular or ovarian inflammation, deafness, or death.

How will the public be informed about these changes?

Public hearings will be held to fully inform Alaskans about the proposed changes and to solicit public comments. If the regulatory changes are approved, a widespread informational campaign will be conducted through the media, parent letters, and information sheets to be distributed through schools and childcare facilities, and presentations before groups of providers and the general public.

Where can I obtain more information?

More information may be obtained from the Immunization Program, Section of Epidemiology at (907) 269-8000 or by visiting our website: www.epi.hss.state.ak.us.