



## MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Your public health team, connecting with our communities to achieve healthier outcomes

Submitted by: Leslie Kinnee, Public Information Officer  
615 N. State St., Stanton, MI 48888-9702  
989-831-3669, [kinnee@mmdhd.org](mailto:kinnee@mmdhd.org)

[www.mmdhd.org](http://www.mmdhd.org)



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### **Add immunizations to back-to-school checklist**

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- It's hard to believe it's August already and time to start thinking about the upcoming school year. Your to-do list is sure to be long, but don't forget to make sure your kids are up-to-date on their immunizations before the first day of school.

All children need protection from vaccine-preventable diseases, like tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B, meningitis and chickenpox. Protection is especially important, though, for those entering a licensed childcare facility, kindergarten or 7<sup>th</sup> grade; and for those changing school districts or starting college, as certain vaccinations are mandatory.

Young adults getting ready to head off to college may think they've outgrown the need for vaccinations, but that's just not so. If your child is college-bound, make sure they are up-to-date on all their immunizations, including the meningococcal vaccine, both to protect themselves and those around them. Some diseases can spread quickly in settings like dorm rooms and classrooms, so many colleges and universities have vaccination requirements for school entry.

Now is the perfect time to check with your health care provider to see if your child is fully protected.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) provides immunizations by appointment to those with Medicaid and without insurance. A small fee may apply for immunizations, but no child is turned away because of the inability to pay.

Children 18 years and younger may be eligible for the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, which provides vaccines at no cost to children who might not otherwise be vaccinated because of an inability to pay. To qualify, a child must have Medicaid, have no health insurance, be under-insured, or be an American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Those with certain private insurance plans may also be able to get vaccinated at the health department; just be sure to call first to make sure your insurance is accepted, and to make an appointment.

It is the health department's responsibility to ensure that the public is protected from vaccine-preventable diseases and that parents are making informed decisions about whether to vaccinate their child or not. If your child is not immunized:

- They are at greater risk of catching vaccine-preventable diseases.
- They can infect others, including infants and the elderly, who are at-risk of suffering a more severe reaction.
- They may be excluded from school or child care for several days or weeks to prevent catching or spreading a vaccine preventable disease.

Across the country there have been outbreaks of diseases like pertussis, measles, and chicken pox, due in part to an increase in the number of children whose parents have waived their immunizations. MMDHD strongly encourages parents to immunize their children, but ultimately, it's the parent's decision. Parents who wish to waive their child's immunizations will need to present the school with a signed waiver. If immunization is being waived because of a medical reason, your

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child's doctor can sign the waiver. If immunization is being waived for religious or personal reasons, the health department will need to sign the waiver. The purpose for requiring the waiver is to make sure that parents have had an opportunity to speak with a health care professional about vaccinations and any concerns they have.

For more information, or to make an immunization or waiver appointment, please call the Mid-Michigan District Health Department at 989-224-2195 in Clinton County, 989-875-3681 in Gratiot County, or 989-831-5237 in Montcalm County.

*Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.*

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