For college students

Minnesota Department of Health

Minnesota's College Immunization Law

Here's what you need to know about the College Immunization Law

When you enroll in college in Minnesota, you may need to show that you've been vaccinated against five major vaccine-preventable diseases: measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, and diphtheria. The Minnesota College Immunization Law applies to anyone who was born after 1956. However, students who graduated from a Minnesota high school in 1997 or later are exempt from these requirements under the law (because they will already have met them as a high school student), although some colleges may require proof of immunizations from these students too. Minnesota laws also require post-secondary schools to provide students with information on the transmission, treatment, and prevention of hepatitis A, B, C, and meningococcal disease.

But adults don't get these diseases – do they?

At one time, getting the mumps or the measles was a normal part of growing up. Then, during the 1960s, effective vaccines became available and we all but eliminated these "childhood" diseases.

But today, while the incidence of disease has dropped dramatically in young children, there are still occasional outbreaks of these diseases and they more often than not affect young adults. It's important, too, for adults of all ages to get "boosted" for tetanus and diphtheria every 10 years throughout their lifetime.

But these diseases aren't very serious – are they?

Measles is the most serious of these five diseases. It can cause life-threatening pneumonia and brain inflammation, middle-ear infections, severe diarrhea, and sometimes convulsions. The risk of death from measles is known to be higher in adults than in children.

Mumps can cause hearing loss. And, about one out of four teenage or adult men who have mumps may experience swelling of the testicles. In rare cases, sterility can result.

Rubella is usually a mild disease in children. But it can be very serious if a grown woman gets rubella during the first three months of pregnancy. The disease can cause serious birth defects including glaucoma, cataracts, deafness, and mental retardation.

Tetanus or "lockjaw" can lead to fatal complications. Even small burns or scratches can be a source of infection, and deep puncture wounds are especially dangerous.

Diphtheria is a serious bacterial disease that affects the tonsils, throat, nose, and/or skin. It can lead to breathing problems, heart failure, paralysis, and sometimes death.

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B is a highly contagious disease that infects the liver and can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with the blood of an infected person or by having sex with an infected person.

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). Hepatitis A can affect anyone. Hepatitis A is still a common disease in the United States and is spread by close contact with someone who is infected. It is also spread by contaminated food and water. Adults need hepatitis A vaccine for long-term protection.

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. *There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.*

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness, caused by a bacteria. Meningococcal disease is a leading cause of meningitis, an infection of the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. Meningococcal disease also causes blood

infections. Anyone can get meningococcal disease. College freshmen who live in dormitories or close living quarters have an increased risk of getting meningococcal disease.

So, what do I have to do?

Under Minnesota law, you have to submit a complete immunization record to your college or meet one of the legal exemptions (see below). You might be automatically exempt if you graduated from high school in Minnesota since 1997 or you previously were enrolled in another college in Minnesota (in which case your former college record should indicate that you met the law's requirements).

Are there other legal exemptions?

Yes. You don't have to get the shots if you've already had one of the diseases such as measles, mumps, or rubella. Or your doctor can sign an exemption if you have another medical reason not to be vaccinated (like you've had a lab test showing you're immune or you're pregnant).

You may also have religious or philosophical objections to being immunized. If so, you can submit a notarized statement of your beliefs.

What if I can't find my shot record?

Try to remember where you were immunized, and see if your doctor or clinic still has the records. Your parents may be able to help. If you attended school in Minnesota (before college) your former school district may still have your records.

If you still can't find your records, you'll probably have to repeat the shots. This time, be sure to keep a record.

Are the shots safe?

The vaccines are very safe and highly effective. There can be side effects, but they are usually brief and not very serious – a slight fever, a sore arm, a mild feeling of illness. More severe side effects do occur, in rare cases. But that risk has to be compared with the risk you will face if you don't get immunized. Without shots, your chances of becoming ill and suffering serious complications are much higher.

Where can I get the shots?

Your own physician can provide the shots you need. If you don't have a physician, or you don't have health insurance, you may be able to get the shots through a community clinic. Call your county or city health department for more information. Your college may also offer the shots through the health service or a special immunization clinic.

If I'm <u>not</u> required to receive hepatitis A and B and meningococcal shots, should I still get them?

Yes. For example:

- College freshmen living in dorms or close living quarters are at a higher risk for meningitis. There is a vaccine to protect against the disease.
- Hepatitis B is a highly contagious disease that infects the liver. The highest rate of disease occurs in persons 20-49 years of age.
- Hepatitis A is still a common disease in the United States. Hepatitis A symptoms are much more severe in adults than in children. Infected persons may need to rest in bed for days or weeks, and won't be able to drink alcohol until they are well.
- If you will be **traveling internationally**, it's likely you'll need even more shots. Be sure to check with your doctor to see what additional shots you might need.

MINNESOTA MDH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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