

GBPH begins student suspension prevention plan

June marks the beginning of the 2023 *suspension prevention* season.

During this season, Grey Bruce Public Health's Vaccine Preventable Diseases team will identify students who are missing vaccines required by the Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) and reconcile their immunization records.

The ISPA requires school-aged children to receive a series of immunizations against designated vaccine preventable diseases, except in cases of medical or non-medical exemptions. The purpose of the ISPA is to reduce the risk of outbreaks in schools and keep children safe. Under this Act, non-compliant students are at risk of being suspended from school. Ontario health units are required to notify students who are missing required vaccines and help them meet ISPA requirements before the scheduled suspension period.

At GBPH, every effort is made to keep children safe and in school by helping families meet the ISPA criteria. Rather than waiting until the fall to distribute suspension notices, our VPD staff is sending letters to the parents of all non-compliant students this summer. These letters advise parents that we are missing records for certain immunizations and provide parents with different options to become complete. Parents can either provide missing records to GBPH or book appointments to receive missing vaccines. This gives families a little extra time to become compliant.

This summer, VPD staff will attempt to reconcile immunization records for roughly 4,000 non-compliant students, focusing on students in kindergarten to Grade 4. We are anticipating a very high call volume, as parents phone in to ask questions, report vaccines, and book appointments. Nurses will be answering calls and emails each day to support clients and healthcare providers with their questions. Additionally, program assistants will be busy updating immunization records received from parents and healthcare providers. VPD will also be operating student vaccination clinics throughout the summer to help increase access to vaccine for students and reduce the burden on primary care, as most children within this age group are vaccinated at their primary care provider.

Along with the VPD team at GBPH, the communications team will be hard at work sending reminders to get vaccinated and upload vaccine records through social media and our website. They have also created helpful tools for parents to make the process of uploading records easy. Moreover, the communications team will keep parents and students up to date regarding student vaccination clinic locations and times.

Although this summer promises to be the busiest in years, the VPD team is looking forward to working together with primary care to support the health of students in our communities.

To support ISPA activities, GBPH is asking health care providers to:

- Fax updated immunization records for students to GBPH (519-376-7782) following administration;
- Provide parents with a copy of their child's updated immunization record. Health care providers are obligated to provide this service free of charge.