

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Welcomes Pennsylvania Students Back to School, Provides Health and Safety Reminders

Pittsburgh, PA – The Pennsylvania departments of Education (PDE) and Health (DOH) are welcoming students across the commonwealth back to school, reminding parents to ensure their children's immunizations are up to date and reminding schools about newly available public health safety initiatives.

"It is essential that everyone, especially children, are up-to-date on all recommended immunizations," Acting Physician General Dr. Denise Johnson said. "Immunizations are a safe and effective way to protect yourself and your children from a number of serious, life-threatening diseases. Getting your immunizations can help protect those around you, including people with compromised immune systems who cannot get vaccinated. If you have a child aged 12 or older, make sure they get a COVID-19 vaccine before heading back to school."

[Immunizations](#) are a necessary precaution needed to protect infants, children and teens from serious childhood diseases such as measles, mumps and chickenpox. Staying up to date with immunizations provides the best protection against disease and is essential to individual and population health. Vaccine-preventable diseases can be very dangerous, may require hospitalization, and can even result in death. A discussion with your doctor or your child's doctor can help determine which immunizations are needed.

Parents and guardians should schedule immunization appointments as early as possible. In recent years, a change in state regulations altered the provisional period in which students could attend school without their vaccinations from eight months to five days. Children in grades K-12 need the following immunizations for attendance: tetanus, diphtheria, polio, MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), hepatitis B, and chickenpox. Immunization requirements also extend to students of cyber and charter schools.

Children entering the seventh grade also need additional immunizations of meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV) and tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis (Tdap). If a child does not have at least one dose of the above immunizations, he or she risks exclusion from school.

In addition, DOH and PDE continue to advise K-12 school entities to follow [current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidance](#), to the greatest extent possible, when creating and implementing mitigation policies and practices. [A summary of the CDC's school guidance is available on PDE's website.](#)

"Students and educators are excited to return to classrooms and begin the new school year together. We're excited for them and looking forward to a new academic year filled with opportunity, innovation, and growth," said Secretary of Education Dr. Noe Ortega. "It's vital for our schools to continue to keep the health, safety and well-being of their communities at the forefront. PDE joins the Pennsylvania Department of Health in continuing to recommend school communities follow current CDC guidance."

Schools should also take advantage of the newly available public health safety initiatives. Last week, PDE and DOH [announced](#) two important initiatives to support K-12 schools during the 2021-22 school year. Schools outside of Philadelphia County can now sign up to receive free, weekly COVID-19 testing to identify and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, schools can now request COVID-19 vaccine providers to coordinate a vaccine clinic for the employees, contractors, volunteers, students, or students' families of the school to add a layer of protection against COVID-19.

Acting Physician General Johnson and Education Secretary Ortega's visit occurred on the first day of school for Mt. Lebanon School District. Universal masking is required for all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, while indoors in the district.

"We know that in-person instruction is the strongest and most beneficial learning model for the large majority of our students. The district's goal for the 2021-22 school year is to maximize in-person learning and minimize any disruptions caused by COVID outbreaks and community spread," said Dr. Timothy J. Steinhauer, superintendent of the Mt. Lebanon School District. "We all share the responsibility to practice and model behaviors that have been shown to limit the spread of COVID-19 and encourage general health and wellness. We encourage families to remind students of the best practices in regard to hand washing, managing coughs and sneezes, monitoring personal health and staying home if not feeling well."

PDE continues to support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) as they prepare for and navigate the upcoming school year. This includes through the latest chapter of [PDE's growing Roadmap for Education Leaders; Accelerated Learning through an Integrated System of Support](#). This toolkit includes information and resources to help address students' learning loss and other issues caused by the pandemic.

Anyone looking to visit a local immunization clinic to receive vaccinations should call 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) to schedule an appointment. Pennsylvanians should have their vaccination records available when they call to make an appointment. A parent or legal guardian must accompany a child receiving immunizations.

For more information on immunizations, visit the Department of Health's website at www.health.pa.gov or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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