

IMMUNIZATIONS A SHIELD OF PROTECTION

Is your child at risk of being excluded from school starting on September 28th? If they don't have up-to-date immunizations, then the answer is yes. Last year, over 200 students were sent home from public schools in Buncombe County because they did not have documentation of their immunizations on file with the school.

State law mandates that children going into kindergarten and 7th grade must be up-to-date on their immunizations and that the school have a record of those immunizations on file. If the school does not have a student's immunization records by September 28th, the student will be sent home from school and not allowed to return until their immunizations are up-to-date and their records are on file with the school. Every day missed is counted as an unexcused absence for your child, which can add up quickly. This information has been shared with all families of students through letters and phone calls from school administrators over the last several months. As a busy parent just like you, I know that it can be tough to keep checking things off the "to-do" list, but by taking the time now to get your child immunized, you ensure that your child won't be sent home from school later.

As the Buncombe County Medical Director, I urge you to give your child a shield of protection by making sure that they are immunized. Immunizations are one of the easiest and safest ways to protect our children. As we continue to see outbreaks of chickenpox and pertussis (whooping cough) in our County, and measles and mumps in NC and nationally, we know that these illnesses are right outside our door and sometimes finding a way inside. School administrators, medical providers, public health professionals and others locally are worried about the damage these illnesses could do in our schools because we know that our students are more vulnerable than most. Buncombe County consistently has the highest percentage of kindergarteners in NC who are not fully immunized. This hole in our community's shield of protection means that not just our students but all of us are at risk of getting sick with vaccine-preventable infections.

These dangerous illnesses can spread quickly in schools if students are not immunized. If an outbreak occurs at your child's school and your child is not immunized, they will be sent home until the outbreak has ended. This is not a punishment for them not being immunized, but an attempt to keep them safe. We also urge teachers and school staff to be immunized to add an extra layer of protection for themselves and their students. Individual cases or outbreaks of these illnesses can cause hospitalization and missed time from work, are expensive to contain, and will most certainly interfere with a child's important job of learning at school.

Please contact your child's medical provider to find out what immunizations they still need or to obtain their records. You can also call the Buncombe County Health and Human Services Immunization Clinic at 828-250-5096 with questions about immunizations or visit us at 53 S. French Broad Ave. to get immunized. Immunizations are a shield of protection for our community and it takes all of us to keep this shield strong.

Dr. Jennifer Mullendore, MD, MSPH
Medical Director, Buncombe County Health and Human Services

