Immunization Coverage in Schools and Licensed Child Care Settings

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Routine childhood immunizations protect children, families and communities from serious infectious diseases. High vaccination coverage helps prevent outbreaks, limit the spread of illness and protect those who are too young to be fully vaccinated or at greater risk of severe complications.
- The 2025 measles outbreak underscored the importance of vaccination. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDG Public Health) reported 72 outbreak-related cases, including 50 among infants, children and youth. Of the total cases, 53 involved people who were unvaccinated or under-vaccinated. The outbreak also disrupted schools, child care and families. demonstrating the broader effects of vaccine-preventable diseases.
- WDG Public Health works with families and schools to support childhood immunizations and maintain accurate vaccination records. During the 2025–2026 school assessment cycle, WDG Public Health delivered 6,371 notices to families, supported 29 school-based catch-up clinics and reported 3,402 vaccine doses at in-school clinics.
- Improving access to immunization is essential for community protection. WDG Public Health works with community partners to reduce barriers and help children and youth receive recommended vaccines through school-based, office, evening and community clinics; multilingual information; simplified record reporting; and individualized support.

Background

Immunization is one of the most effective ways to prevent infectious diseases and protect community health.[1] Routine childhood vaccines protect against diseases that can cause serious complications, hospitalization and, in some cases, death. High vaccination coverage also helps limit the spread of disease, protecting individuals who may be more vulnerable to infection.

In Ontario, the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* (ISPA) and the *Child Care and Early Years Act*, 2014 (CCEYA) establish immunization requirements for children attending school and licensed child care. Public health units are responsible for assessing and maintaining immunization records, identifying children who may require additional vaccines and supporting families in meeting these requirements.[2]

Accurate immunization records are an important part of disease prevention. An incomplete record does not necessarily mean a child is unvaccinated; it may mean that a vaccine was received but has not yet been reported to WDG Public Health. Maintaining complete records helps WDG Public Health identify children who may need vaccination and respond quickly when a vaccine-preventable disease is circulating in the community. WDG Public Health works with families, schools, licensed child care providers and health care providers to support routine immunization, maintain accurate records and improve access to vaccination services.

Immunization coverage for the school-based hepatitis B, human papillomavirus and meningococcal vaccination programs was previously reported to the Board of Health in June 2026. This report focuses on the broader importance of childhood immunization, the impact of the 2025 measles outbreak and WDG Public Health's efforts to support families in accessing vaccines.

Why Immunization Coverage Matters

Vaccines help protect children from infectious diseases that can cause serious illness and long-term health complications. Maintaining high vaccination coverage reduces opportunities for diseases to spread through schools, child care settings, households and the broader community.[1]

This protection is particularly important for infants who are too young to have completed their recommended vaccinations and people with weakened immune systems who may be at greater risk of severe illness.[1]

The benefits of immunization extend beyond preventing illness. When outbreaks occur, families may experience missed school or child care, time away from work, additional medical appointments and disruptions to daily activities. Outbreaks also place increased demands on

health care and public health services through case investigations, contact follow-up and efforts to prevent further transmission.[1]

Preventing vaccine-preventable diseases helps children remain healthy, attend school and child care, and participate in everyday activities while contributing to a healthier community.

Lessons from the 2025 Measles Outbreak

The 2025 measles outbreak demonstrated how quickly a vaccine-preventable disease can affect children, families and the broader community.

Between February and June 2025, WDG Public Health reported 72 outbreak-related measles cases.[3] Fifty cases occurred among infants, children and youth aged 19 and younger, including nine infants under one year of age and 16 children aged one to four years. Among all reported cases, 53 individuals were unvaccinated or under-vaccinated, while an additional seven individuals declined to disclose their immunization status and therefore could not be confirmed as having adequate protection against measles. These findings highlight the importance of vaccination as the most effective way to prevent measles and protect vulnerable populations, particularly infants and young children.

Under Ontario's routine immunization schedule, children receive their first dose of measles-containing vaccine at 12 months of age and a second dose between four and six years of age to provide more complete protection.[4] This highlights the importance of maintaining high immunization coverage to help protect infants who are too young for routine vaccination and young children who have not yet completed their vaccine series.

The outbreak required significant public health follow-up. WDG Public Health identified 2,088 contacts, directly assessed 272 people through public health nurses (PHNs) and facilitated 112 vaccination appointments related to measles exposures.[3]

Schools and child care settings were also affected. Eight schools experienced measles exposures, resulting in the temporary exclusion of 218 students until their immunity could be confirmed.[3] Depending on the circumstances, students who are not protected against measles may be excluded for up to 21 days following their last exposure.

WDG Public Health issued five measles advisories to child care centres and provided preparedness and infection prevention resources to all 149 licensed child care centres in the region.

The outbreak underscored the importance of timely vaccination and accurate immunization records in preventing disease, identifying children at risk and enabling a prompt public health response to exposures.

Immunization Assessment and Follow-up

Reviewing immunization records is an important part of WDG Public Health's work to protect children from vaccine-preventable diseases. Each year, WDG Public Health assesses records for children and youth attending schools and licensed child care settings to identify those who may require additional vaccines or updated immunization information.

During the 2025–2026 immunization assessment cycle, 81% of secondary students and 90% of elementary students already had up-to-date immunization records or valid exemptions on file with WDG Public Health. At the time of assessment, the remaining 6,390 students, including 2,736 secondary and 3,654 elementary students, were identified as having overdue or incomplete records requiring follow-up.

WDG Public Health successfully delivered 6,371 notices to families, providing information on how to report vaccinations, access required vaccines or submit a valid exemption. PHNs and program staff supported families throughout the process by answering questions, reviewing records and connecting students with vaccination opportunities. Most outstanding records were addressed through this follow-up process. For students whose records remained incomplete after repeated notifications and opportunities to meet the requirements, temporary school suspension was applied as a final step under ISPA. In total, 766 students were temporarily suspended, including 374 secondary and 392 elementary students.

WDG Public Health also identified 1,887 children attending licensed child care with overdue or incomplete immunization records and successfully delivered 1,752 notices to support families in updating their information. See Table 1 for an overview of assessment and vaccination activities in school and child care.

In addition to school-based clinics, WDG Public Health offered 261 dedicated clinics across all three office locations to help students meet ISPA requirements.

Table 1. ISPA and licensed child care assessment activity, 2025–2026

Group	Initially overdue or incomplete	Notices sent*	Total suspended	Immunizations provided at in-school clinics	School clinics†
Secondary	2,736	2,729	374	1,700	20
Elementary	3,654	3,642	392	1,702	9
School total	**6,390**	**6,371**	**766**	**3,402**	**29**
Licensed child care	1,887	1,752	N/A	N/A	N/A

** Successfully emailed or mailed; returned mail excluded.*

† Excludes WDG Public Health office clinics.

Discussion

Supporting Families and Improving Access to Immunization

WDG Public Health works with families, schools, licensed child care providers, health care providers and community organizations to support routine childhood immunization. Through vaccination clinics, clear communication and improvements to immunization record reporting, WDG Public Health helps families access recommended vaccines and keep their children's records up to date.

Accessible Vaccination Opportunities

School-based immunization clinics provide convenient opportunities for children and youth to receive vaccines in a familiar setting. WDG Public Health also offers vaccination through office clinics, evening appointments and community outreach.

During 2025–2026, WDG Public Health expanded immunization services in partnership with schools and community organizations, including outreach in rural communities such as Palmerston and Shelburne. PHNs provide vaccination, immunization record reviews and education, while schools and community partners assist with clinic coordination and communication with families.

WDG Public Health will continue offering school-based clinics, office appointments and community outreach during the 2026–2027 school year.

Making Records Easier to Update

WDG Public Health has simplified how families receive immunization reminders and report their children's vaccinations. Families can now upload a photograph of an immunization record online rather than entering each vaccine dose individually. Information can also be submitted in person, by telephone, fax or mail.

Secure electronic notices, school communications, website information and text reminders help families understand when records need to be updated and how to submit the required information.

These improvements make reporting easier for families and help WDG Public Health maintain accurate records to support immunization assessment and disease prevention.

Supporting a Positive Vaccination Experience

WDG Public Health recognizes that vaccination can cause fear or anxiety for some children and youth. PHNs use evidence-based approaches—including preparation resources, distraction techniques, and pain- and anxiety-reduction strategies—to support a positive experience.

WDG Public Health is also supporting University of Guelph research to develop needle-fear resources, including a preparation workbook for youth aged 12–18 and a social story for autistic children and youth preparing for vaccination.

Longer appointments, individualized plans and sensory-friendly approaches are also available to help children and youth feel comfortable and supported during vaccination.

Health Equity Implications

Families do not have equal access to immunization services. Transportation and language barriers, limited access to primary care or the internet, difficulty navigating health services and individual support needs can make it harder to receive vaccines or submit immunization records. As a result, children may miss recommended vaccines, and families may have difficulty meeting school and child care immunization requirements.

WDG Public Health works with schools and community partners to reduce these barriers by offering school-based, rural, evening and office clinics; translated resources and interpretation services; flexible options for submitting records; and individualized vaccination support. Schools help advance equitable access by hosting vaccination clinics in familiar, accessible settings, sharing information with families and coordinating services. These efforts help WDG Public Health reach children and youth who may otherwise face barriers to vaccination.

Partnerships with trusted community organizations further support this work. For example, through Immigrant Services Guelph Wellington, WDG Public Health works with Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) to help families understand immunization requirements, navigate the vaccination process, complete consent forms and access on-site interpretation. WDG Public Health has also expanded multilingual information, including translated materials on vaccine consent, immunization record submission and school-based vaccination programs. These resources provide families with clear information to support informed decisions about their children’s immunizations.

Together, these partnerships and initiatives reduce barriers, improve equitable access to recommended vaccines and help children and families across Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph benefit from immunization.

Conclusion

The 2025 measles outbreak reinforced the importance of routine childhood immunization in protecting children, families and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases. Maintaining high immunization coverage through timely vaccination helps prevent serious illness and reduce the risk of future outbreaks. By working with families, schools, health care providers and community partners to improve access to immunization and reduce barriers, WDG Public Health continues to support the health and well-being of children and the broader community.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- ☒ Population Health Assessment
- ☒ Health Equity
- ☒ Effective Public Health Practice
- ☐ Emergency Management

Program Standards

- ☐ Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- ☐ Food Safety
- ☐ Healthy Environments
- ☐ Healthy Growth and Development
- ☒ Immunization
- ☒ Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- ☐ Safe Water
- ☒ School Health
- ☐ Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDG Public Health Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan.

- ☒ Improve health outcomes
- ☒ Focus on children's health
- ☒ Build strong partnerships
- ☒ Innovate our programs and services
- ☐ Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

References

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