

Screening and Suspension Process

The screening and suspension process takes place from November to May of each school year; schools are divided into six 'waves' to make the process more manageable from a program resource perspective. During the 2018-19 school year Kindergarten 2 (previously known as Senior Kindergarten) to Grade 11 students were included in this process. For the upcoming school year, Kindergarten 1 students (previously known as Junior Kindergarten) will also be added.

Every fall, the Vaccine Program receives enrolment information, including student demographics, from all elementary and secondary schools in Hamilton (Public, Catholic, French and Private schools). This enrolment information allows the vaccine program to carry out the reporting requirements needed to identify students who have: 1) not reported all required vaccines to public health or 2) not received all required ISPA vaccines.

1) Screening and suspension process

The process begins with identifying students who do not have an up-to-date vaccine record on file with public health.

Parents and guardians of these students are then notified of the missing vaccine information via a mailed screening letter, **five weeks** prior to a suspension day. The letter contains detailed information about:

- ISPA
- their child's specific information on what vaccines are needed to meet ISPA requirements
- medical and conscientious exemptions
- how to access vaccines
- how to report vaccines to public health (in person, fax, phone or online)

On suspension day, schools are provided with a list of students who did not meet the ISPA requirements and therefore must be excluded from school. It is important to note that the suspension order is to the principal requiring them to suspend the students that do not meet ISPA requirements. As soon as public health is provided with the required information that the vaccine has been received or an exemption form submitted, the suspension order is immediately rescinded, and the school is advised that the student may return. An order of suspension can be enacted for up to 20 school days and can be renewed.

2) Efforts to support ISPA process

Suspension is a last resort for public health. As such, the vaccine program actively supports schools and parents/guardians in order to prevent a student from being suspended or, if suspended, to resolve the issues quickly to allow the student to return to school as quickly as possible.

Information to school boards

Early in the fall, school boards are provided with the screening and suspension plan which outlines suspension dates for all schools. Public Health also provides a brief information document for principals outlining ISPA and its requirements. Ongoing support is available to principals to address school or parent concerns.

Immunization support

To support parents and ensure timely access to vaccines, the program runs vaccine clinics the day before, day of, and day after suspension day. The clinics are open to students who require vaccines to either prevent or rescind a suspension order.

The vaccine program also runs three community clinics per month (in the east end, mountain and downtown) for children unable to access vaccines through a health care provider or who were unable to receive the vaccines administered at Grade 7 school-based immunization clinics (Hepatitis B, Menactra and Human Papillomavirus).

Two years ago, the program initiated high school clinics as a means of decreasing barriers for students and parents. This effort has been highly successful with over 2800 students receiving vaccines in the last two years. The program will continue to provide this valuable clinical service.

Follow-up with schools and parents

Approximately one week following a suspension day, nurses begin follow up with schools to ensure compliance with the suspension order. Challenges with the order are addressed and nurses offer to follow up with parents as needed. After school follow-up has been completed, nurses then attempt to contact parents to address any barriers to either obtaining their child's vaccine record, completing an exemption or accessing needed vaccines. Nurses will also follow up with family physician practices at the request of a parent. Follow-up with parents may not be successful if wrong contact information is on file.