

IMMUNIZATION RECORD REVIEW AND SUSPENSIONS

Questions and Answers for High School Principals

Why are students suspended from school related to Immunization?

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is required under the provincial [Immunization of School Pupils Act \(ISPA\)](#) to collect and maintain up-to-date immunization records for every student registered in school in Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka. Having access to up-to-date immunization information on students is critical for public health to prevent the spread of vaccine preventable diseases in schools in the event of a case or exposure.

According to the ISPA, the health unit is required to review student immunization records and implement a suspension process for students whose families do not respond to our requests for updated immunization information. **For the 2026/2027 school year, records for high school students born in 2009 & 2010 are being reviewed. Those who do not provide the required information will be suspended on Tuesday, September 22nd, 2026.**

What is required for students to be in compliance with the ISPA?

Students must provide one of the following to be in compliance with the ISPA:

- Proof of complete immunizations based on the student's age for vaccines required according to ISPA

OR

- A [Statement of Medical Exemption form](#) completed by a medical doctor or nurse practitioner if the student cannot receive one or more vaccines required under the ISPA for medical reasons.

OR

- If a family is choosing for the student not receive one or more of the required vaccines, then a parent must complete a Vaccine Education Session and complete a [Statement of Conscience or Religious Belief](#) affidavit. **Families must contact the health unit to initiate this process.**

Under which Legislative Authority are health units and schools acting when suspending students from school related to immunization?

The [ISPA](#) is the Ontario law that requires students attending public or private schools to provide up-to-date immunization information to public health. Public health units (PHUs) are required to keep and assess vaccination records of all students under 18 years of age. PHUs must implement the ISPA in their local region each school year. When PHUs are assessing student's records, those who are not up to date can be suspended from school for up to 20 school days until the required information is received. If the information is not received within the initial 20-day suspension period, additional orders for additional 20-day suspension periods can be issued under this legislation until the required information is received by public health. Also, in accordance with the ISPA, fines of up to \$1,000 can be issued to those who do not comply with the legislation.

Under the ISPA, school boards are required to share demographic information of students with public health each year. When a suspension order is issued under the ISPA by the local Medical Officer of Health, the Order of Suspension is issued to the principal of the school, and under the ISPA, the principal must enforce this suspension order until the required information is received by the health unit, and the suspension order is rescinded. Orders of Suspension issued by the Medical Officer of Health that principals must enforce are not same as suspension orders that principal's issue under the Safe Schools Act.

How does the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA) apply in the enforcement of the ISPA?

In accordance with the ISPA, PHUs are required to maintain an immunization record for each student which must include the student's demographic information, the school they attend, and their immunization information (either the vaccine record or valid exemption). The *Education Act*, the PHIPA and the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* work together to provide the Medical Officer of Health at the SMDHU with the authority to collect, use and disclose information about a pupil for the purposes of ISPA.

What role do Principals play in the immunization review and suspension process?

Principals play a key role in the immunization suspension process. Principals have key relationships with students and their families and can offer encouragement, reminders and assistance to comply with the ISPA requirements. They can also remind families that they can contact SMDHU with any questions they have about immunization or the ISPA.

Principals are legally required under the ISPA to enforce suspension orders issued by the Medical Officer of Health:

Order for suspension re designated diseases

6. (1) A medical officer of health, in the circumstances mentioned in subsection (2), by a written order may require a person who operates a school in the area served by the medical officer of health to suspend from attendance at the school a pupil named in the order. R.S.O. 1990, c. I.1, s. 6 (1).

Our goal is to work together with schools and families to avoid suspending students from school and to maximize immunization uptake by families, and once suspensions are in effect, our goal is to get students back to school as quickly as possible.

Each school is assigned a designated immunization nurse who will offer support throughout the suspension process. They will be calling in June to introduce themselves, provide their contact information and to coordinate a date for an immunization clinic at your school in September prior to suspension day.

SharePoint for Up-to-Date Access to Student Suspension List in Live Time

The SMDHU is now using SharePoint as a secure electronic method for providing school leaders and administrative staff with live time access to the list of students in their school who remain eligible for suspension. Instructions, along with a link to access the SharePoint portal, will be sent to your school's general office email from our immunization program administrative team the week of August 24th. If your school has not received their link by August 28th, please email immunization.admin@smdhu.org.

How are the parents/guardians/students informed of the suspension?

Immunization reminder notices were mailed home in May 2026. Nurses from the health unit attempted to reach families over the summer by phone to provide support, and additional immunization clinics were offered all summer. Suspension orders will be mailed home to students who have not responded the week of August 24, 2026. These suspension orders will be effective September 22nd if the required information is not received by the health unit by that date.

Do International Students need to comply with the ISPA requirements?

Yes. All students registered for school need to comply with the ISPA requirements.

Are there supports available for newcomer families?

Yes, the health unit has a variety of supports in place to support newcomer families.

If your school has a Settlement Worker in School (SWIS), we encourage you to have newcomer families complete a referral form for this program, and the SWIS worker can support the family with navigating the ISPA process.

The letter included with the suspension order has a QR code located in the top corner that families can scan which will take them to the letter on our website where Google Translate can be used to translate the information into many different languages. Our nurses also have access to translation services that we can use over the phone to communicate if needed.

Leading Up to Suspension Day

How can Principals and school leaders help support the suspension process leading up to suspension day?

Once you have gained access to your school's list in SharePoint of students eligible for suspension, review your list of students and notify your **immunization nurse** in advance of suspension day of any students who:

- no longer attend your school,
- do not attend school in person (i.e., virtual learners),
- are currently away from school (i.e., out of the country, extended leave), or
- may require additional supports due to homelife challenges, language barriers, etc.

Due to privacy and security, please do not email student's name. If you are emailing with your immunization nurse, please use student's Client ID included on the SharePoint list, or student initials and DOB. If you are aware of difficulties or challenges that a student and their family are facing, your input to the health unit is invaluable. We will work with these students and families to assist them before suspension day.

Based on our experience, when principals engage directly with students and their families, they take action to avoid suspension sooner. Leading up to suspension day, we would appreciate Principals' support in communicating with students who are eligible for suspension and with their families. There is a Shared Resources folder available in SharePoint that contains a variety of draft communication tools that you can use to assist with this (i.e., email templates, announcements, newsletter inserts).

NEW: Immunization Clinics at High Schools

To make accessing immunizations as easy as possible, the health unit will be providing an immunization clinic at each high school in September before suspension day. As your school's clinic date approaches, please send a reminder home using your school's preferred communication channels and remind students on your suspension list of the importance of attending this clinic to avoid suspension from school.

If students miss their school clinic, where can they access vaccinations?

- Students can contact their health care provider to make an appointment to receive the missing vaccine(s). Once they receive the vaccine(s), they must report the information to public health.
- Students can book into a health unit immunization clinic while appointments last at
- www.smdhu.org/appointments

Nurses will be available to see students on a drop in, first come, first serve basis as follows

Dates and Times	Health Unit Offices
Monday September 21 to Friday September 25 9am – 12pm & 1:30-4pm	15 Sperling Drive Barrie, Midland, Orillia, Cookstown, Collingwood & Gravenhurst

*A nurse will be available Thurs., Sept. 24 in the Huntsville office from 9am-12pm and 130pm-4pm

On Suspension Day - Tuesday September 22, 2026 and Beyond

What happens when suspended students show up at school the morning of suspension?

On the morning of September 22nd, any students who are remaining on your school's SharePoint suspension list must be removed from the classroom and placed in a predetermined location at the school. Parents/Guardians must be contacted and if possible, the student should be picked up and removed from the school. Parents should be contacted by the school to indicate that the student may not return until the immunization information is provided to the health unit.

You are required to enforce suspension ongoing for any student who remains on the suspension list for your school in SharePoint until they are removed from the list by the health unit. As soon as the health unit has received their required information, the student will be removed from the SharePoint list, and the student can attend school immediately. The student is not permitted to return to school until they are removed from the SharePoint list.

How long can a student be suspended from school due to incomplete immunization?

A student will remain under suspension for up to 20 school days, therefore students suspended on September 22nd may be out of school until October 20, 2026. If the required immunization information has not been received within 20 days, the order for suspension may be re-issued.

What should principals do if they have a family who refuses to comply with the suspension?

Principals should advise their school immunization nurse and their school superintendent. The health unit and the school board will then work together to support the principal with next steps.