

Vaccination programs in Northern Territory Government schools policy

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1. Introduction

The Northern Territory (NT) Government is committed to ensuring every Territorian has timely access to the vaccines they need and that every Territorian is well-informed and confident about receiving immunisation from vaccine-preventable disease.

Under the *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011*, the Department of Education (the department) has a statutory duty of care, wherever reasonably practicable, to ensure employees and others are not exposed to risks to their health and safety.

The department and the Department of Health (DOH) work together to provide vaccination services to children in NT Government schools. School vaccination programs will be planned and undertaken in accordance with the National immunisation program (NIP) schedule, the NT immunisation schedule children (up to 19 years) and the DoH School-based immunisation program primary health care urban guideline. However, a program may be implemented at any time in response to a local disease outbreak and in response to any of the Australian Government or NT directions listed below.

From-time-to-time, the Australian Government and NT Ministers for Health or the NT Chief Health Officer (CHO) may issue requirements, directions, orders or instructions in relation to matters of public health, including vaccinations, that may contradict this policy. This policy is subordinate to such requirements, directions, orders or instructions and as soon as it is practical to do so, the department must comply.

At the time of this policy being approved, this includes:

- any requirement or direction of the Australian Government Minister for Health, legally in-force under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Cth) and in relation to a human biosecurity emergency declared by the Governor-General
- any direction, order or instruction of the NT Minister for Health made under the *Public and Environmental Health Act 2011*
- any direction of the CHO issued under the declaration of a public health emergency
- the requirements of the *Australian Immunisation Register Act 2015* (Cth) and associated Australian Immunisation Register Rule 2015 (Cth).

Department staff, contractors and volunteers engaged by the department must obey any requirement, direction, order or instruction issued by the Minister for Health or the CHO.

2. Context

This policy applies to all NT Government schools. The NT immunisation program is also administered in NT non-government schools in conjunction with DoH; however, non-government schools should have their own policy.

Vaccination programs in schools are currently undertaken with middle and senior school students: years 7 to 12. This may change as Australian and NT government policy adapts to new and evolving diseases, to advancements in disease prevention and control and in response to declarations made by Australian Government or NT Ministers for Health or the CHO.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
DoH vaccination provider	A suitably qualified health care professional who meets the relevant legal and professional standards to provide vaccinations in NT schools on behalf of DoH. This includes Health Promoting School Nurses (HPSN) whose role it is to plan and assist in the provision of school immunisation programs in accordance with DoH policy and procedures. HPSNs also participate in Department of Education critical incident responses as required, including outbreaks of infectious disease in the school community
Immunisation	The process of becoming immune to disease through vaccination
Informed consent	Agreement given by an individual once they have been provided with appropriate information to reach a decision on that agreement
Parent	A child's father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for that child, including a person who is regarded as a parent of the child under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander customary law or tradition
Vaccine	A substance, approved and registered for use in Australia by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, used to stimulate the production of antibodies and provide immunity against one or several diseases
Vaccination	The act of receiving a vaccine from a healthcare professional
Vaccine-preventable disease	A disease for which an effective vaccine exists

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1. Principals

Principals are responsible for:

- working with DoH vaccination providers to ensure vaccination programs are planned and delivered with minimal disruption to the education and wellbeing needs of students
- providing parents and students with easily understood communications from DoH about planned and proposed vaccination programs. Parents and students must be informed of the processes, benefits and possible side effects of receiving each vaccine as well as being provided with information about the disease against which they are being vaccinated, to enable informed consent.

4.2. Department of Health

DoH will be responsible for:

- meeting the legal and professional requirements to be able to provide vaccinations in NT schools and working within the confines of DoH policy, procedure and guidance. All vaccine providers are able to be used by DoH to deliver school-based vaccination services so long as this service is within their professional and legal scope of practice
- recording of vaccinations on the student's immunisation record.

5. Policy Considerations

5.1. Consent

Vaccination for students is strongly encouraged but is not compulsory. Parents and students must be made aware that they have a right to refuse vaccination.

Parents and students who are deemed capable of making informed decisions must give informed consent to a vaccine being administered. Informed consent may be written, electronic or verbal, but must be given by a person voluntarily, without duress and with the legal and intellectual capacity to understand the implications of receiving a vaccine. Informed consent cannot be given unless the potential risks and benefits of the relevant vaccine and any alternative options have been explained. Information must be explained in a way that is appropriate to the person, for example through an interpreter, a cultural support person or by use of communication aids.

Collection of consent through school immunisation programs will follow protocols agreed to by the department and DoH:

- department staff will seek signed consent forms from parents, which will be provided to DoH staff prior to student vaccinations
- where prior written consent has not been obtained, department staff will assist by connecting DoH staff with the parent and facilitate obtaining verbal consent
- the department acknowledges that if a parent has provided written consent to the vaccine but a student with capacity refuses consent, DoH will not vaccinate the student
- DoH accepts all responsibility and liability for obtaining and recording legal consent, including verbal consent, from the parent to administer the COVID-19 vaccination to the student.

Carers of students who are in the care of the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC) may provide consent for standard childhood immunisations and vaccinations against infectious diseases as outlined in the TFHC Decision making for carers – guideline.

5.2. Privacy

The department is committed to protecting the privacy of staff, students, parents and members of the school community in accordance with its Privacy policy – Privacy statement. The Privacy statement contains the department's policy for the management of the personal and sensitive information collected, used and disclosed by the department.

5.3. Unvaccinated students

Some students are too young to be vaccinated against certain vaccine-preventable diseases and some may have medical reasons for being unvaccinated against all, or some vaccine-preventable diseases.

In line with the department's Infectious diseases – exclusions from school policy, NT Government schools may exclude students who have, or may have, been exposed-to infectious diseases from attending school. DoH's Centre for Disease Control (CDC) provides the Time-Out factsheet as a reference for parents and schools about the exclusions that apply to a number of infectious diseases. The factsheet is available on the DoH library services website.

Section 4.2(c) of the department's Enrolment procedures states that:

'Parents must provide a Medicare Immunisation History Statement or the child's Immunisation Card to preschools and primary schools for both immunised and non-immunised children. Prospective students will not be prevented from enrolling in a Northern Territory Government school or early childhood education program if they have not been immunised.

Collection of immunisation status certificates assists health authorities in protecting the school community in the event of a vaccine-preventable disease occurrence at the school. In the event of a vaccine-preventable disease occurrence, the department will be guided by the CDCs Time Out factsheet and specialist advice issued by the Department of Health. Refer to the Infectious diseases – exclusions from school policy for more information.

Parents of middle and senior secondary school student applicants are not required to provide a Medicare immunisation history statement.'

5.1. The NT Immunisation Program

DoH and the department work together to ensure that all students have access to vaccinations that are in the NIP and the NT immunisation schedule children (up to 19 years). Students are able to access the NT immunisation program at a setting of their choice. If they choose not to be vaccinated during the school program, they should be referred to the local primary health care centre or their usual medical practitioner for follow up to ensure they are able to be vaccinated.

6. Related policy, legislation and resources

6.1. Policy

Department of Education

[Emergency management - school preparedness policy](#)

[Enrolment Procedures](#)

[Health of students policy](#)

[Infectious diseases – exclusions from school policy](#)

[Privacy Policy – Privacy Statement](#)

Department of Territory Families, Territory Families, Housing and Communities

[Decision making for Carers - Guidelines](#)

6.2. Legislation

6.2.1. National legislation

[Australian Immunisation Register Act 2015](#)

[Australian Immunisation Register Rule 2015](#)

[Biosecurity Act 2015](#)

[Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 \(Vic\)](#)

[Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011](#)

6.2.2. NT legislation

[Anti-Discrimination Act 1992](#)

[Education Act 2015](#)

[Education and Care Services \(National Uniform Legislation\) Act 2011](#)

[Emergency Management Act 2013](#)

[Notifiable Diseases Act 1981](#)

[Public and Environmental Health Act 2011](#)

[Work Health and Safety \(National Uniform Legislation\) Act 2011](#)

6.3. Resources

[National Immunisation Program Schedule | Australian Government Department of Health](#)

[Northern Territory COVID-19 Vaccine Administration Protocols \(CVAP\)](#)

[Northern Territory Immunisation Schedule Children \(up to 19 years\)](#)

[Time Out Factsheet](#)

[Vaccination information sheets](#)

Acronyms	Full form
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
CHO	Chief Health Officer
Cth	Commonwealth
DoH	Department of Health
HPSN	Health Promoting School Nurses
NIP	National Immunisation Program
NT	Northern Territory
TFHC	Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities

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2	18 November 2021	Student Wellbeing and Inclusion	Edits proposed by NT Health; removal of references to COVID-19; addition of agreed actions between the Department of Education and DoH
3	14 January 2022	Student Wellbeing and Inclusion	Final version endorsed by: Executive Director, Early Years and Education Services; COVID-19 Emergency Response Group
4	November 2022	Student Wellbeing and Inclusion Programs and Services	Administration amendments to align roles and responsibilities to the structural alignment in effect from 1 July 2022, including NTG template and minor formatting.