

Childhood Immunizations

DEFINITION

Childhood immunizations is the percentage of children ages 19 months to 24 months who have received the entire 4:3:1:3:3:1:4 series of vaccinations as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. In 2026, the complete series included 4 doses of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTaP); 3 doses of polio; 1 dose of measles, mumps, rubella (MMR); 3-4 doses of Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib); 3 doses of hepatitis B vaccines (Hep B); 1 dose of varicella (chickenpox); and 4 doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV).¹

SIGNIFICANCE

Vaccines help the immune system learn to produce antibodies that protect the body if it is later exposed to disease. Timely and complete immunization protects children against many infectious diseases that were once common and resulted in death or disability. The benefits of immunization include improved quality of life and productivity and reduced health spending. High vaccination levels also protect society by reducing disease outbreaks and reducing exposure for medically vulnerable children who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. As a result of decades of immunization, many of the diseases against which children are vaccinated are rare, but outbreaks still occur. It is

important to continue to immunize against them until the diseases are completely eradicated.²⁻⁴

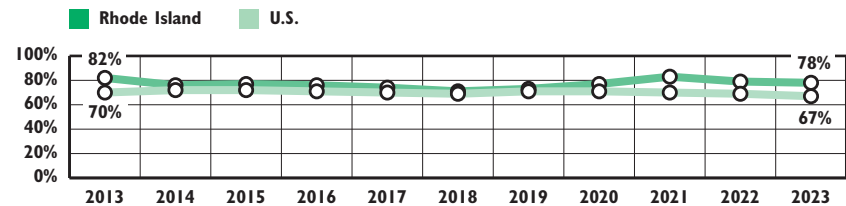
The federal *Vaccines for Children* program is used to eliminate cost as a barrier to vaccination. It allows states to obtain vaccines at a discounted price. Local providers then administer the vaccines at no cost to eligible children under age 19, including those who are uninsured, underinsured, or Medicaid-eligible.^{5,6} Due to the federal *Affordable Care Act*, children and individuals enrolled in health insurance plans have access to recommended vaccines without deductibles or copays, when delivered by an in-network provider.⁷

The Rhode Island Department of Health obtains and distributes vaccines and works in partnership with local health care providers to maintain and share KIDSNET immunization data with authorized health care professionals for children from birth through age 18.⁸

Rhode Island requires vaccination against the following diseases prior to entry into child care, preschool, or Head Start: diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis; Haemophilus influenza type b; hepatitis A; hepatitis B; seasonal flu (influenza); measles, mumps, and rubella; pneumococcal conjugate; polio; rotavirus; and varicella (chickenpox). Kindergarten entry requires all of these except seasonal flu and additional doses of DTaP, hepatitis B, MMR, polio, and varicella.^{9,10}



Fully Immunized Children*, Rhode Island and United States, 2013-2023



*Fully immunized children received the 4:3:1:3:3:1:4 series. In 2018, the National Immunization Survey-Child (NIS-Child) methodology changed from coverage among children 19 to 35 months of age to coverage by age 24 months.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Immunization Survey-Children, 2013-2023. 2024 data not available.

- ◆ In 2023, 78% of Rhode Island's children were fully immunized by age 24 months, above the national average of 67%.¹¹
- ◆ In 2021-2023, the U.S. rate for fully immunized children by age 24 months was 45% for uninsured children, 62% for children with Medicaid coverage, and 74% for children with private health insurance coverage.¹²
- ◆ Despite their well-demonstrated safety, misinformation leads some parents to request an alternate schedule or refuse some vaccines, leaving all children at greater risk if an outbreak occurs.^{2,13} At every immunization, parents or guardians receive information about possible side effects, risks, and benefits.¹⁴

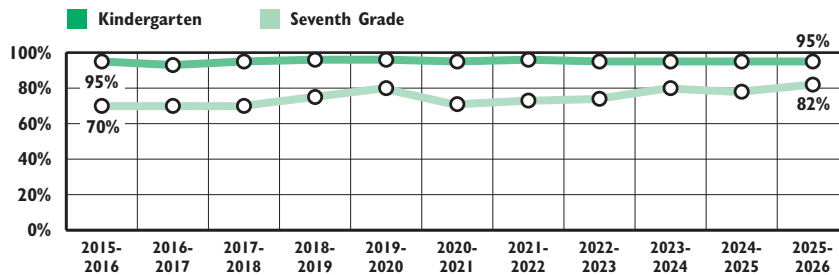


Immunizations for School Entry

- ◆ Of the immunizations needed for school entry in 2025 in Rhode Island, entering kindergarteners had coverage rates between 90% and 98%, while entering 7th grade students had rates between 72% and 90%.¹⁵
- ◆ Although all major religions support routine childhood immunizations, Rhode Island allows parents to request religious exemptions from vaccines required to attend child care or school. In rare cases, a doctor will determine that a child is medically exempt from immunization requirements.^{10,16} In the 2025-2026 school year, 205 kindergarten students and 399 seventh grade students had exemptions from vaccination requirements. Ninety-one percent of kindergarten exemptions and 92% of 7th grade exemptions were for religious reasons.¹⁵



School Entry Immunization Compliance, Kindergarten and Seventh Grade, 2015-2016 through 2025-2026 School Years



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health Immunization Program. (2026). *2015-2025 School Immunization Surveys*. *National Immunization Survey* data for 2024 were not available by print date.

◆ For Kindergarten entry, students are required to have five doses of the DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) vaccine, 3 doses of the Hepatitis B vaccine, 2 doses of the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine, 4 doses of the polio vaccine, and 2 doses of the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine.¹⁰ For the 2025-2026 school year, 95% of kindergarteners had all the vaccines required for school entry.¹⁵

◆ Students entering 7th grade must have met the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten immunization requirements, plus one dose of the HPV vaccine, one dose of the Meningococcal conjugate (MCV4) vaccine, and one dose of Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) vaccine.¹⁰ For the 2025-2026 school year, 82% of seventh graders had all the vaccines required for school entry.¹⁵

◆ The Rhode Island Department of Health recommends that everyone ages six months and older get both seasonal (2025-2026) COVID-19 vaccines and seasonal flu (influenza) vaccines.^{17,18}

◆ As of January 2026, 4% of Rhode Island children under age five and 2% of children ages five to 17 had received the 2025-2026 COVID-19 vaccine. For 2024-2025, 67% of Rhode Island children ages six months to 17 years received the seasonal flu vaccination.^{19,20}



Adolescent Immunization

◆ All Rhode Island seventh grade students are required to receive the human papillomavirus (HPV); tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis (Tdap); and meningococcal conjugate (MCV4) vaccines, as well as any needed catch-up doses, for entry into school.¹⁰

◆ According to the *2023 National Immunization Survey*, 80% of Rhode Island adolescents (ages 13-17) have completed the HPV series, compared to 57% nationally; 95% of Rhode Island adolescents received the Tdap vaccine, compared to 89% nationally; and 96% of Rhode Island adolescents received the MCV4 vaccine, compared to 88% nationally.¹¹

◆ To ensure that all high school seniors are fully vaccinated before beginning college or work, the Rhode Island Department of Health Office of Immunization runs the *Vaccinate Before You Graduate (VBYG)* program at school-based clinics throughout the state. The program holds vaccination clinics throughout the year at each participating school. The immunizations are funded by the federal *Vaccines for Children* program, local insurers, and other federal grants and are offered at no cost to students.^{21,22}

◆ During the 2024-2025 school year, 82 schools participated in VBYG, down from 90 schools the year prior. In total, 4,614 vaccine doses were administered, down from 4,800 vaccine doses administered the year prior. Vaccines administered included seasonal flu, HPV, MCV4 and MenB (meningococcal diseases), hepatitis A, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, and rubella, polio, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, and varicella (chicken pox).^{18,22,23}

◆ As of January 2026, the *School Located Vaccination (SLV)* program had administered 11,200 doses of the seasonal flu vaccine to both children and adults at school-based clinics throughout Rhode Island in the 2025-2026 school year. The goal of SLV is to ensure all Rhode Island children receive their seasonal flu vaccination at no out-of-pocket cost.²⁴

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(continued on page 177)

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(continued from page 51)

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(continued from page 55)

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