

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS POLICY CHANGE

(FOR EMPLOYEES)



What is Mercyhurst requiring?

All employees born after January 1, 1957 are required to submit documentation of vaccination for measles, mumps, and rubella (the MMR vaccine). Employees born before January 1, 1957 are presumed immune and need not submit documentation unless they work directly in the health care area (e.g. health center personnel, athletic trainers).

Why is Mercyhurst taking these steps?

The Pennsylvania Secretary of Health recently confirmed five cases of measles in Allegheny County – the first outbreak of the disease in our state this year. Additional cases have been confirmed in Allegheny County since the outbreak. Given how quickly measles cases have progressed in 2019, it is only a matter of time before we have confirmed cases in Erie. In fact, a case of measles was recently diagnosed in Meadville, Pennsylvania, about 45 minutes from Mercyhurst's Erie campus.

What is measles?

According to the CDC, measles starts with fever, runny nose, cough, red eyes, and sore throat. It is followed by a rash that spreads over the body. The virus is highly contagious. The disease is easily contracted following exposure – unvaccinated individuals who are exposed to the measles are 90 percent likely to contract the disease. It takes an average of 14 days between exposure to the virus to the first appearance of the rash. However, the actual time can range from 7 to 21 days. It is important to know that the usual contagious period of the disease starts four days before the appearance of the rash and continues until four days after that appearance.

In addition to the immediate flu-like symptoms experienced with measles, the virus can compromise the immune system for a period after the infection. As a result, infected individuals may develop secondary illnesses (e.g. pneumonia) following the measles. According to the CDC, about one in four measles patients will require hospitalization.

Measles can be prevented with the MMR vaccine. According to the CDC, "the MMR vaccine is very safe and effective. Two doses of MMR vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles; one dose is about 93% effective." The vaccine is readily available through most health care providers, including some pharmacies who administer vaccinations. The vaccine is usually covered by health insurance.

What documentation is acceptable?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, sufficient documentation includes:

- written documentation of adequate vaccination (must include exact vaccination dates):
 - one or more doses of a measles-containing vaccine administered on or after the first birthday for preschool-age children and adults not at high risk
 - two doses of measles-containing vaccine for school-age children and adults at high risk, including college students, healthcare personnel, and international travelers -OR-
- laboratory evidence of immunity -OR-
- laboratory confirmation of measles

What if I don't comply with this policy?

In the event of a potential case of measles or mumps on our campuses, employees without adequate documentation on file may be subject to quarantine or a campus prohibition (i.e. you won't be allowed to come to work). These restrictions may last for several weeks following an outbreak. Employees without adequate documentation on file may be subject to unpaid leave or use of accrued time during the quarantine or campus prohibition.

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Who is at risk of acquiring the measles?

According to a recent health alert issued by the Pennsylvania Secretary of Health, “Anyone born since 1957 who has not received two doses of effective measles vaccine known as MMR, which would include infants too young to have been immunized; persons who were vaccinated with an inactivated vaccine, which was used from 1963 through 1967, and have not been re-vaccinated; and those who refused vaccination.” *(emphasis added)*

If you were born...	Vaccination protocols at the time...
Before 1957	You are presumed to be immune and the vaccination is not indicated by the CDC.
Between 1957 and 1989	If you were vaccinated, you likely only received a single dose of the MMR vaccine. Public health officials are encouraging you to get a second dose.
Between 1963 and 1967	You likely did not receive an effective vaccine containing the active virus. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are recommended (separated by at least 28 calendar days).
After 1989	Contemporary protocols recommended two doses of the MMR vaccine. If you were vaccinated, you likely already received two doses. You still need to submit adequate documentation to the university.

What if I don't know my vaccination status or can't locate sufficient documentation?

If you do not know if you were vaccinated, per the CDC, you can safely receive the two-dose series of the MMR vaccine (separated by at least 28 calendar days). You can also ask your physician to do bloodwork that will indicate your immunity levels.

Who can request an exemption from this policy?

Individuals with certain medical conditions are exempt from the vaccine requirement. Persons with certain allergies, pregnant women or those who may become pregnant, persons with weakened immune systems, and some other individuals are advised against vaccination. Consult your doctor to determine whether you are advised against vaccination. To claim exemption for medical reasons, request a signed doctor's note on letterhead which indicates that the MMR vaccine is contraindicated due to preexisting medical conditions. The doctor's office can fax this to 814-240-6750.

Under university policy, you may also request an exemption based on religious grounds or on the basis of a strong moral or ethical conviction similar to a religious belief. To claim an exemption on these grounds, submit a signed letter stating your objection and attach the waiver supplemental document available at mercyhurst.edu/vaccines.

In the event of a potential case of measles or mumps on our campuses, employees with exemptions on file may be subject to quarantine or a campus prohibition (i.e. you won't be allowed to come to work). These restrictions may last for up to three weeks following any outbreak. In the event of quarantine or campus prohibition, the Human Resources Department will work with affected employees to determine status while on leave.

In the event of an outbreak, what determines if I'm quarantined or prohibited from campus?

The university will follow the recommendations of the Department of Health to determine which individuals are subject to quarantine or campus prohibition.

Mercyhurst encourages you to contact your primary care physician or other health care provider if you have questions or concerns about these diseases or vaccination protocols.