

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS POLICY CHANGE

(FOR STUDENTS)



What is Mercyhurst requiring?

All degree-seeking students taking courses on university campuses are required to submit documentation of vaccination for measles, mumps, and rubella (the MMR vaccine). In addition, students living in campus housing must provide documentation for the meningitis meningococcal conjugate vaccine (ACWY). These requirements are consistent with the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

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?

For measles, written documentation of two MMR vaccines (including the exact vaccination dates) is required. The first vaccine must have occurred on or after the first birthday. At least 28 calendar days must have elapsed before the second dose was administered.

For meningitis, students living on-campus must also provide documentation of having received at least one dose of the meningitis meningococcal conjugate vaccine (ACWY). The documentation must include the exact vaccination date.

What if I don't comply with this policy?

In the event of a potential outbreak, students without adequate documentation on file with the university will be asked to leave campus. Exposed individuals may be quarantined at the direction of the Department of Health. These restrictions may last for several weeks following the outbreak. There shall be no refund of tuition, fees, room, or board (except in the case of withdrawal, in which case refunds shall be calculated according to the university's refund policy). Mercyhurst is unable to guarantee the ability make up lost coursework during this time for students who fail to submit adequate documentation.

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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.

Did I already submit health documentation to Mercyhurst University?

Perhaps. Most students who matriculated to the Erie campus as traditional freshmen were required to submit a health record. The Cohen Health Center is currently reconciling those records to certify confirmation of the MMR vaccination (and, for on-campus students, the meningitis vaccine). If you didn't submit the necessary documentation, we will contact you individually throughout the summer.

If you are a commuting student, adult student, or graduate student, it is unlikely that you were required to submit documentation in prior years. You should begin making arrangements to submit this documentation.

If you know you've never submitted documentation, you or your health care provider can submit documentation online at mercyhurst.edu/vaccines or by fax to 814-240-6750.

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, students with exemptions on file will be asked to leave campus. Exposed individuals may be quarantined at the direction of the Department of Health. These restrictions may last for several weeks following any outbreak.

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.