



Keep Kids Healthy as They Go Back to School

Health insurance and good health care help children grow and stay well. This care includes routine vaccines. Vaccines teach a child's body how to fight serious diseases before the child is exposed. Just like cell phone updates help block online threats, vaccines help the body get ready to fight viruses.

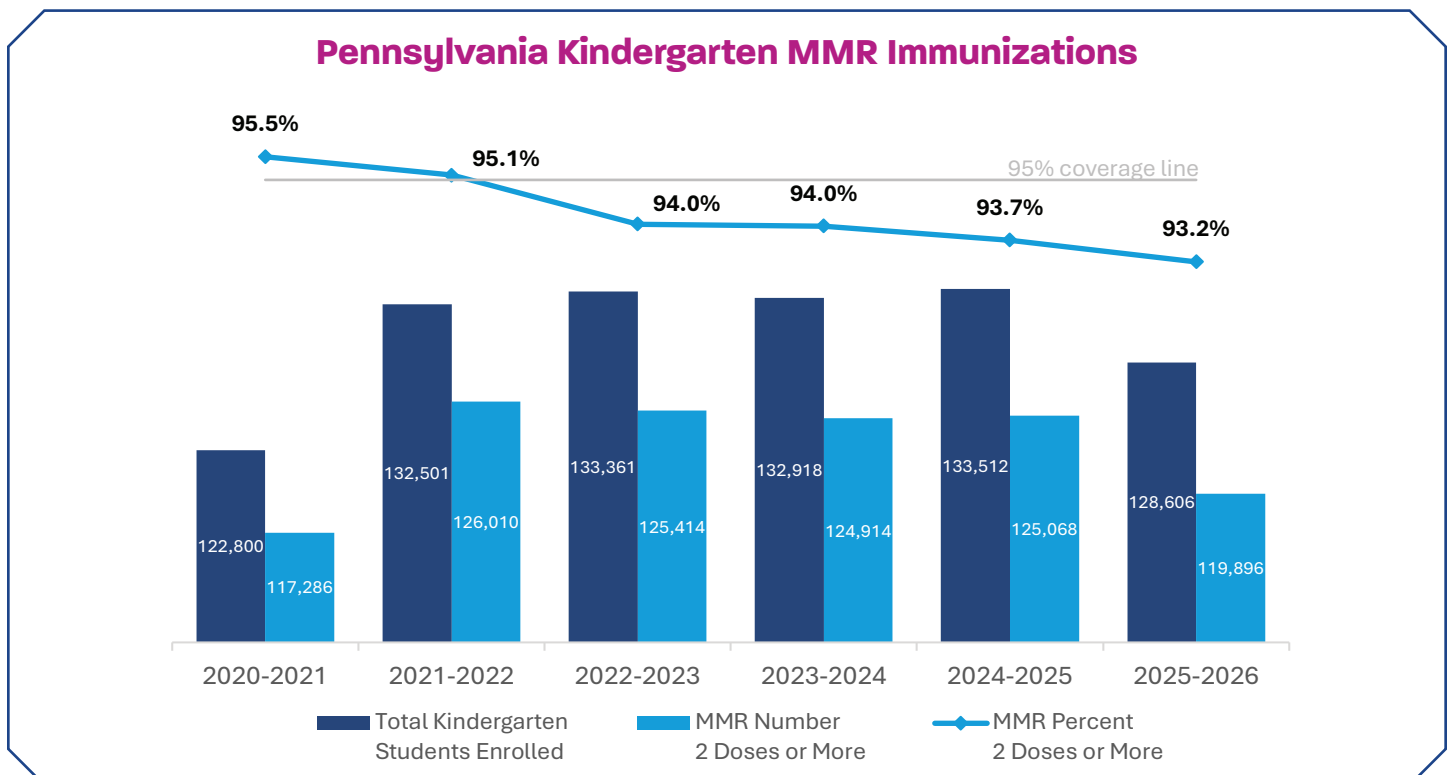
Before school starts, many families schedule a checkup for their child.

Parents may have questions about vaccine timing, safety, or who can get vaccines. A child's doctor or health care provider can check the child's vaccine record, answer questions, and explain which vaccines are needed before school starts. Vaccines help children stay healthy at school, with friends, and during activities.

August is National Immunization Awareness Month. As school starts, Pennsylvania families can check whether their children are up to date on routine vaccines. This helps children stay healthy both in and out of the classroom.

MMR Vaccine Trends

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, measles cases in Pennsylvania and across the country have reached their highest level in more than 35 years. No measles cases in Pennsylvania include individuals who are fully vaccinated. This is a reminder that vaccines help protect children and communities from preventable diseases.



Source: PPC analysis, Pennsylvania Department of Health, School Immunization Law Report System, School Years 2020-2021 through 2025-2026

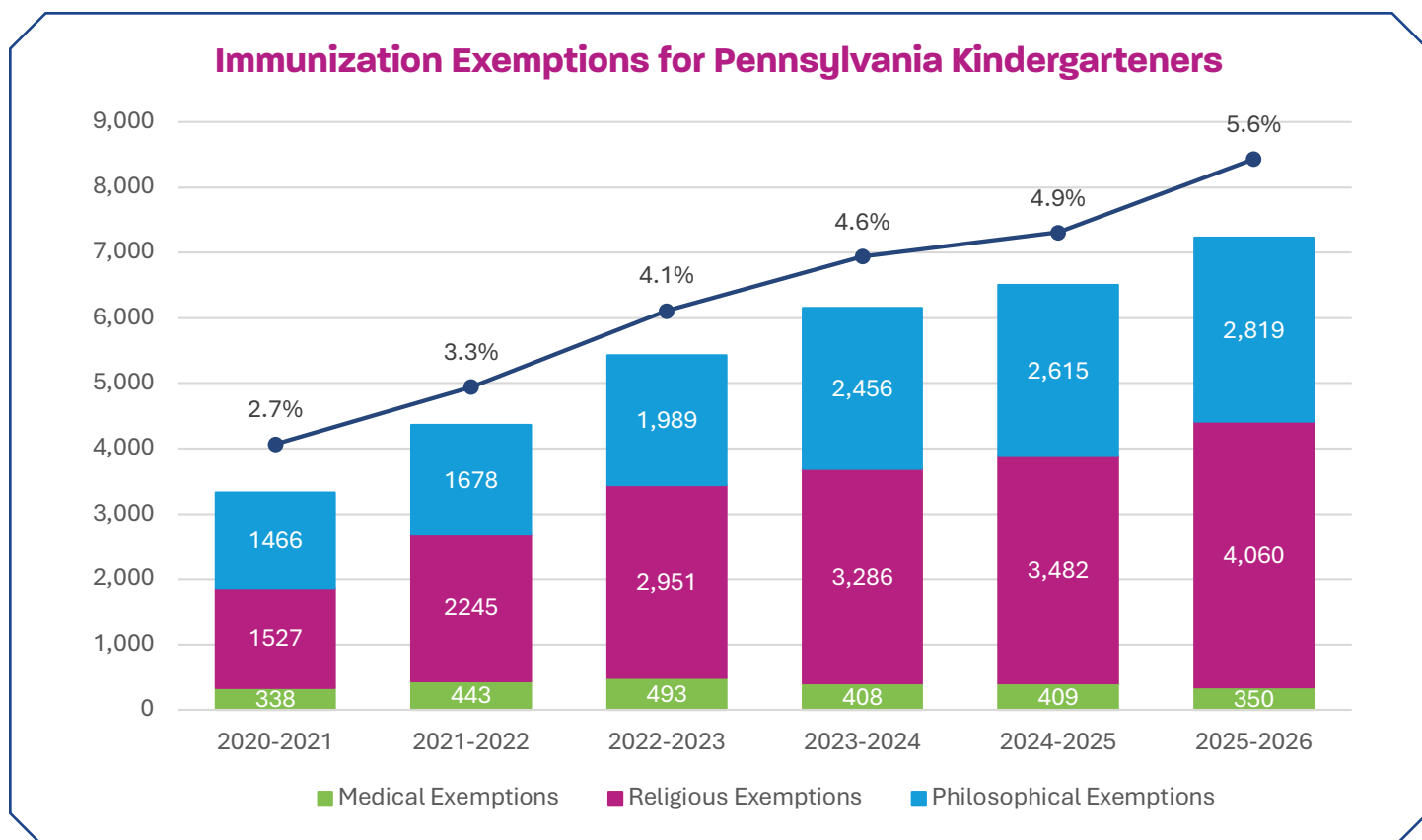


In Pennsylvania, 93.2% of kindergarten students have the required measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccines. This is the lowest rate in recent years. It is also below the 95% goal for the fourth year in a row.

Because measles is spreading, the Pennsylvania Department of Health recently started an [online dashboard](#) that tracks measles cases by age and by county.

As vaccine rates have gone down, the number of exemptions has gone up. Most of the increase was in religious and philosophical exemptions. Medical exemptions require a doctor's signature and remain the smallest group.

The number of exemptions more than doubled over a five-year period. It rose from 3,331 students, or 2.7%, in the 2020–2021 school year to 7,229 students, or 5.6%, among all Pennsylvania kindergarten students in the 2025-26 school year.



Source: PPC analysis, Pennsylvania Department of Health, School Immunization Law Report System, School Years 2020-2021 through 2025-2026

PA Families Can Get Low-Cost Health Insurance

Start crossing off your back-to-school list with free or low-cost health insurance. Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) cover yearly checkups, vaccines, mental health care, dental care, medicines, and more.

Families can sign up for Medicaid and CHIP at any time of year. They can apply for free or low-cost coverage whenever they need it. Coverage helps make sure children can get important care.

Medicaid 1-866-550-4355 or [online](#)

CHIP 1-800-986-KIDS (5437) or [online](#)

Pennie™, Pennsylvania's health insurance marketplace, is another choice for families. Open enrollment starts November 1. Families may also sign up at other times after a major life change, such as losing health coverage or having a baby.

Pennie™ 1-844-844-8040 or [online](#)

Vaccines for Children Program Gives Free Vaccines

The Pennsylvania Department of Health runs the Vaccines for Children Program. It gives free vaccines to children who do not have health insurance or whose insurance does not pay for vaccines. To learn who can get free vaccines and where to find a provider, call the **Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

