

Colorado Minors Can Now Access Some Vaccines on Their Own: How A New Law Makes This Possible



In 2021 a new Colorado law (SB21-016: *Protecting Preventive Health Coverage*) was passed. The law allows minors to consent to obtaining certain vaccines that protect against some common and sometimes dangerous, but preventable, infections. **Parental or legal guardian approval is now not required for minors (people under age 18) to obtain the human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis A, and hepatitis B vaccines during a healthcare visit that includes the discussion of reproductive health.**

Public Health Benefits of the New Law

- 1 *Improves youth access to health services*
- 2 *Increases herd protection against dangerous and sometimes deadly illnesses*
- 3 *Reduces health inequities and healthcare costs, especially in communities disproportionately impacted by these preventable diseases*

What Changed?

Prior to the passage of this law, minors in Colorado could already consent to testing and treatment for confidential services related to reproductive health and sexually transmitted infections. However, the existing law was unclear on minor consent to preventive services. **The new law allows minors to consent to the HPV, and hepatitis A and B vaccines because when administered in the context of a confidential reproductive health visit, these vaccinations are considered preventive services.**

Prior to the passage of this law, minors in Colorado could already consent to testing and treatment for confidential services related to reproductive health and sexually transmitted infections, but was unclear on minor consent to preventive services. The new law allows minors to consent to the **HPV, and hepatitis A and B vaccines** because when administered in the context of minor consent, these vaccinations are considered preventive services. Before 2021, healthcare providers were required to counsel minors on the importance of discussing with their parent or legal guardian any care they received through confidential services. For minors age 13 and younger, health care providers may involve the minor's parents or legal guardian if needed. The new law keeps in place these existing policies.

Why The New Law Matters

Vaccines save lives. The HPV, hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines prevent infections which can lead to cancer, liver infection, or even death. Allowing adolescents to consent to these vaccinations can protect them against these in the future.

Which Vaccines Does the Law Allow Minors to Consent To?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

- HPV is very common; **80 million people** become infected each year
- Most infections clear, but some lead to **cancers of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and oropharynx**.
- Annually, HPV causes about **36,500 new cases of cancer** in the U.S., and about 600 cases in Colorado.
- People of color, especially Black women, are **disproportionately impacted** by HPV-related cancers.
- The vaccine is recommended at ages 11-12 (it can be given as early as 9) before a child is ever exposed.
- The vaccine is safe; research shows it has resulted in an **88% drop in HPV infections** among girls.
- Despite the vaccine's efficacy, **only 66.4% of Colorado teens** ages 13-17 were fully vaccinated in 2021.

Hepatitis A

- **Hepatitis A virus causes liver infection** and can lead to hospitalization and even death; nearly three out of four cases requires hospitalization.
- Hepatitis A is spread through fecal-oral contact, commonly due to **poor hand hygiene**.
- Some people are at **higher risk** for hepatitis A infection, including persons experiencing homelessness, substance use issues or incarceration, as well as men who have sexual encounters with other men.
- In 2019-20, Colorado experienced a hepatitis A outbreak, with over **300 reported cases and two deaths**.
- The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and **over 95% effective**.

Hepatitis B

- **Hepatitis B virus (HBV) causes liver infection** and can range from mild to severe.
- HBV is spread through **exchange of bodily fluids** during sexual contact, while sharing needles, syringes or other drug-injection equipment, or from mother to baby during birth.
- For many people who become infected, HBV is a short-term illness; for others, **it can become chronic** and lead to life-threatening issues like cirrhosis or liver cancer.
- About **90% of infants with HBV develop chronic infection**; conversely, only 2 - 6% of people who get HBV as an adult become chronically infected.
- **The hepatitis B vaccine is 98% effective** at preventing infection.

What Parents Can Do



DISCUSS with your children the importance and safety of all recommended vaccines across the lifespan



EDUCATE your pre-teens and teens about self care and the increasing importance of choosing healthy behaviors and accessing wellness and health services as they seek more autonomy and independence



ENCOURAGE family members with questions or concerns about vaccines to consult a healthcare professional or access information from a reliable, science-based website such as the CDC or American Academy of Pediatrics