

New U.S. Antarctic Program deployment requirement: Measles-Mumps-Rubella vaccine is now mandatory

Media questions about this new policy should be directed to Peter West, (703) 292-7530 / pwest@nsf.gov

The National Science Foundation is introducing a new policy requiring that all personnel deploying to U.S. Antarctic stations and research vessels be vaccinated for Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR).

This protocol will be instituted immediately for all personnel deploying to the Antarctic.

All personnel not yet physically qualified (PQ'd) for deployment will be required to provide proof of immune status OR receive the MMR vaccine before they will be authorized to deploy. Personnel who are currently deployed are protected while they are in place BUT will be required to provide proof of immune status or receive the vaccine before they will be authorized to deploy again. The PQ forms will be revised to make the new requirement apparent.

NOTE: There is a group of individuals who are already PQ'd but who have not yet deployed. These individuals must provide proof of immune status or receive the vaccine before they will be authorized to deploy as it is imperative that we not introduce the disease to the stations and vessels. These individuals will be contacted directly by staff of the medical care provider for the U.S. Antarctic Program, the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB).

Why is this change being made?

Recent U.S. and New Zealand outbreaks have caused the U.S. Antarctic Program to consider whether we should take some preventive action. Infectious disease experts and the Medical Review Panel for NSF's Division of Polar Programs have recommended that we expand our infectious disease protocols to require that all participants be vaccinated for MMR.

Many colleges and universities already have the same policy and

also require annual flu shots, chicken pox and polio vaccines, among others.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, citing the ease of contamination for people preparing to board cruise ships where, as for U.S. Antarctic Program participants, they will share close living quarters with people from many different places, recommends that travelers be up-to-date with routine vaccinations, including influenza vaccine, for travel to Antarctica.

Other travel vaccines are recommended according to the specific countries one travels through on the way to Antarctica.

The CDC's Health Information for Travelers is identical for both U.S. Antarctic Program gateway cities, New Zealand and Chile: Participants should make sure they are up-to-date on routine vaccines before every trip. These vaccines include the MMR vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and a yearly flu shot.

PQ screening guidelines will be revised as follows:

- a. All participants will continue to be required to have a yearly flu shot.
- b. Participants currently are allowed to elect either the DT (diphtheria-tetanus) or the DTP (diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis) vaccine. Effective with new PQ applications, the full DTP will be required. The interval remains the same at baseline and every 10 years.
- c. There are no current plans to require varicella or polio vaccine.
- d. All participants will be required to provide proof of vaccination for MMR or, failing that, vaccination will be mandatory according to your Group:

Group 1: Individuals born in the United States before 1958 and in New Zealand before 1968 are presumed immune because the disease was so widespread in the pre-vaccine era and no further action is required.

Group 2: Individuals who served in the U.S. military since 1960

are presumed immune through vaccination and no further action is required.

Group 3: All participants not in Groups 1 or 2 will either have to prove vaccination – through records or through a blood test – or receive the vaccination. The cost of the blood test or the cost of the vaccination will be reimbursed as part of the PQ process.

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