



Department of
Health



Tennessee Kindergarten Immunization Compliance Assessment Report

2025–2026 School Year

Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) | Communicable and Environmental Diseases
and Emergency Preparedness (CEDEP) | Tennessee Vaccine-Preventable Diseases
and Immunization Program (VPDIP) | August 2026

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Executive Summary

Kindergarten-aged children are more susceptible to infections due to a variety of factors, including their still-developing immune systems, frequent hand-to-face contact, and close physical interactions commonly found in classroom settings. Vaccination builds lasting immunity, provides protection against infectious disease morbidity and mortality, and helps prevent outbreaks in schools and the broader community. While immunization coverage rates among kindergartners remain relatively high, Tennessee has consistently been below the statewide goal of 95.0% coverage since 2021. Declining immunization coverage rates increase the risk of outbreaks and serious outcomes, including death, from vaccine-preventable diseases.

During the 2025–2026 school year, 92.5% of all kindergartners in Tennessee were fully immunized with all required vaccines for kindergarten entry. This rate is relatively consistent with the previous school year's rate of 92.3%. However, the percentage of kindergartners with documented exemptions (e.g., medical, religious, administrative) has increased to an all-time high of 7.5%, largely driven by an increase in religious exemptions, which increased from 3.5% to 4.6% in the last school year. Furthermore, the rate of fully immunized kindergarteners was higher in public schools (92.8%) than in private schools (88.2%).

Key Findings

- Statewide, 92.5% of all kindergartners were fully immunized with all required vaccines for kindergarten entry. This coverage remains below the 95.0% statewide goal.
- 7.5% of all kindergartners were documented as having at least one type of exemption, significantly higher than last year's rate of 6.6%. This increase was driven by an increase in religious exemptions, from 3.5% to 4.6%.
- During the 2025–2026 school year, 17.0% (16 of 94 reporting counties) of Tennessee counties had at least 95.0% of kindergarteners fully immunized with all required vaccines. In comparison with the prior school year, 15.0% (14 of 93 reporting counties) had more than 95.0% of kindergarteners fully immunized.
- Public schools had more fully immunized kindergarteners (92.8%, 978 reporting schools) compared to private schools (88.2%, 112 reporting schools).

About this Assessment

The Kindergarten Immunization Compliance Assessment (*i.e.*, Kindergarten Survey) is an annual assessment completed by the Tennessee Department of Health's (TDH) Vaccine-Preventable Diseases and Immunization Program (VPDIP) in collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and Tennessee public and private schools.

The goal of the assessment is to track immunization coverage and exemption rates for state- required vaccines among children entering kindergarten. Children entering kindergarten in Tennessee must be up to date with the following vaccines which protect against common childhood illnesses at the time of enrollment¹:

- **Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis vaccine (DTaP)**
- **Hepatitis B Virus vaccine (HBV)**
- **Measles, Mumps, Rubella vaccine (MMR)**
- **Poliomyelitis vaccine (IPV or OPV)**
- **Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine/credible history of disease**
- **Hepatitis A Virus vaccine (HAV)**

All required immunizations must be documented on the Tennessee Official Immunization Certificate or a valid U.S. military immunization record.² Immunizing providers are also strongly encouraged to record immunizations in the Tennessee Immunization Information System (TennIIS). TennIIS serves all Tennesseans as a system to confidentially and quickly access vaccination records. Immunization requirements are the same for children with military records.

¹ https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/immunizationrequirements/tenniis/TN_Immunization_Summary_Table.pdf

² <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/112/Bill/SB0386.pdf>

The state of Tennessee defines the following types of immunization certificates and exemptions:

Certificates:

Complete Certification: All vaccination requirements are completed according to the CDC/ACIP immunization schedule or catch-up immunization schedule.

Valid Temporary Certification: A child has not received all required vaccines but is in the process of obtaining them. Temporary certificates expire one month after the date the next required immunization is due, according to the minimum acceptable (“catch-up”) dose interval per the CDC/ACIP schedule. An expired temporary certificate is not valid proof of immunization.

Exemptions:

Religious Exemption: The parents or guardian of a child have submitted a signed statement that vaccination conflicts with their religious tenets or practices.

Medical Exemption: The parents or guardian have submitted a note/form from the child’s physicians (i.e., MD, DO) and/or Public Health Nurse indicating that the child is medically exempt from specific vaccines due to risk of harm. Other vaccines remain required. The medical reason for the exemption does not need to be provided.

Per Tennessee state law, T.C.A. § 49-6-5001, children who have incomplete (i.e. partially immunized) or missing documentation of childhood immunizations without one of the above exemptions are not permitted to attend “any school, nursery school, [or] kindergarten” in Tennessee.

Assessment Process

Tennessee uses a census-based approach to collect immunization data for the Kindergarten Survey. All public schools with kindergarten students enrolled at the time of the assessment are asked to participate, except for schools where students are tested to determine grade level and schools that are distance learning only (i.e. “homeschool”). Additionally, all TDOE- accredited private schools in Categories 1, 1-SP, 2, and 3 that have kindergarten students enrolled at the time of the assessment are

asked to participate.³ School nurses and/or other trained school personnel review students' immunization certificates and report their immunization statuses to VPDIP through the Kindergarten Survey each year.

Below are the immunization status categories that nurses and/or other trained school personnel are asked to use when categorizing their students' immunization status:

1. Fully Immunized: (i.e. TennIIS Validated or signed Immunization Certificate)
 - a. The student is up to date for all required vaccines (e.g., DTaP, HepB, MMR, Polio, Varicella, HepA). For public schools, VPDIP performs an initial check of students' immunization statuses using TennIIS and schools are asked to verify or supply additional information through the survey. For private schools, verification of students' immunization statuses is limited by information received through the survey.
2. Not Fully Immunized:
 - a. Partially Immunized: the student has received some immunizations but is not up to date for all required vaccines and does not have any documented certificates or exemptions.
 - b. Exemptions
 - i. Religious Exemption (defined above)
 - ii. Medical Exemption (defined above)
 - c. Administrative:
 - i. Valid Temporary Certificate (defined above)
 - ii. No Available Immunization Records: the student has no official immunization certificate or military record on file

Statewide results are published on the TDH website⁴, shared with TDOE and school districts, and published on the CDC SchoolVaxView website⁵. Kindergarten Survey data for multiple years can be found on the TDH Immunization Coverage Rate Dashboard website⁴ and can be used to draw comparisons against national objectives and evaluate trends over time.

³ https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/nonpublic/Non-Public_Schools_Category_Descriptions_APPROVED.pdf

⁴ <https://www.tn.gov/health>

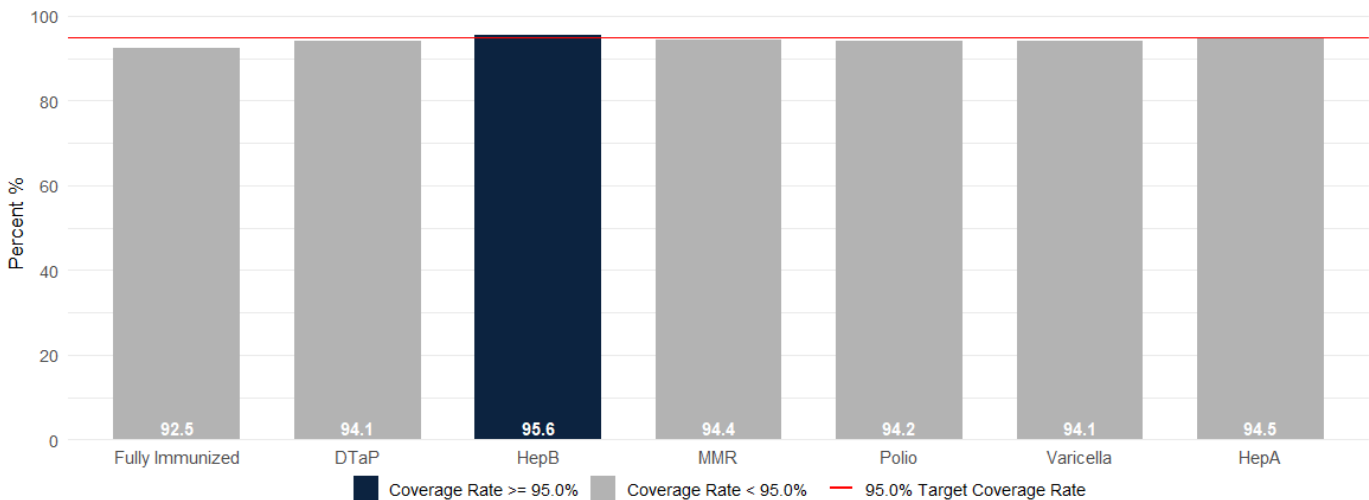
⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/schoolvaxview/data/index.html>

Detailed Findings

Vaccine-Specific Data

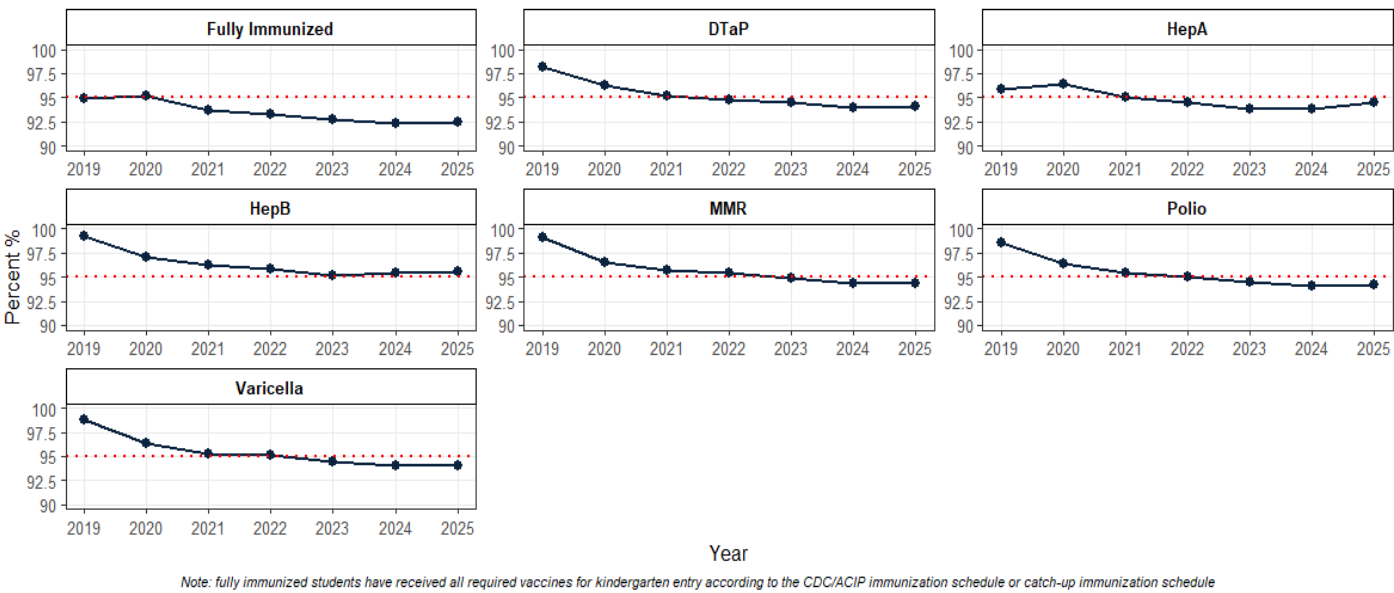
To evaluate compliance with TDOE’s vaccine requirements, including use of exemptions, rates of individual vaccine series (e.g., MMR) and fully immunized status are described. This helps TDH assess outbreak risk for specific vaccine-preventable diseases. If a student had received partial immunizations, has a valid temporary certificate, medical exemption, or religious exemption, schools are asked to report which individual vaccine series’ the student has completed. **Figure 1** shows the percentage of public and private school students who were complete for each vaccine series compared to the statewide goal of 95.0%. The percentages in **Figure 1** reflect both public and private school kindergarten students’ immunization coverage overall, and for individual vaccine series, regardless of whether they had received all the vaccines required for school enrollment.

Figure 1. Percentage of All Kindergarten Students Who Were Fully Immunized and Complete for Each Vaccine Series, compared to the Statewide Goal, 2025—2026.



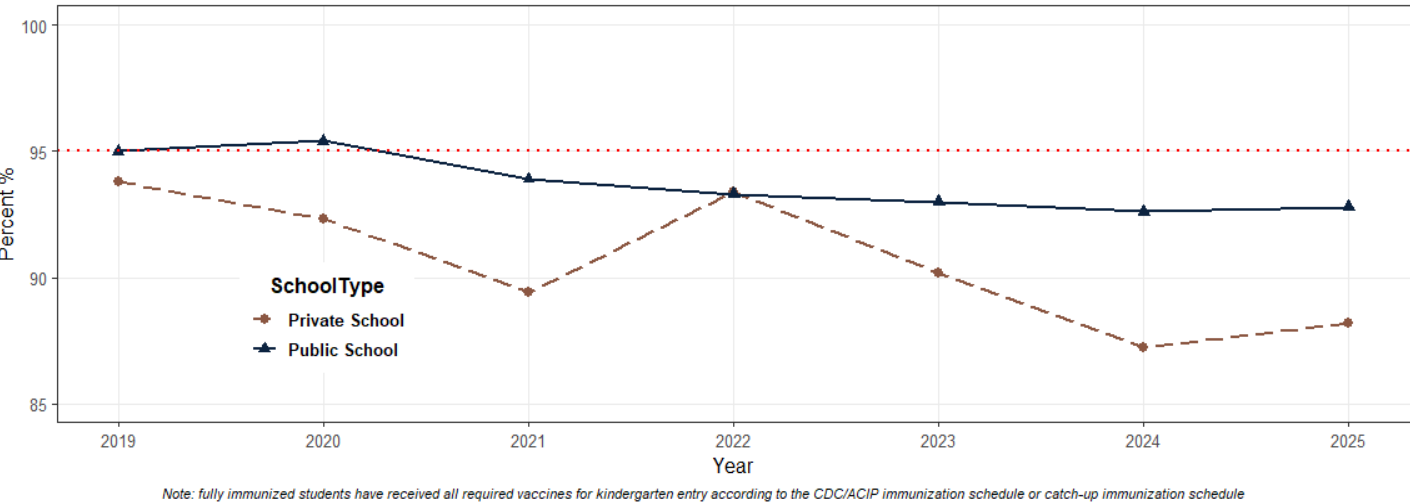
During the 2025–2026 school year, Tennessee remained stable in coverage rates for almost all reported vaccines. Compared to the previous school year, coverage rose slightly for DTaP (94.1% from 94.0%), Hepatitis B (95.6% from 95.4%), Polio (94.2% from 94.1%), and Hepatitis A (94.5% from 94.0%). Meanwhile, MMR (94.4%) and Varicella (94.1%) coverage rates remained stable. Tennessee coverage rates this school year remained below the statewide coverage rate goal of 95.0% for all but one of the required vaccines in the kindergarten vaccine series. **Figure 2** shows the coverage rate trends of all vaccines in the kindergarten series from 2019 to 2025.

Figure 2. Percentage of All Kindergarten Students Who Were Fully Immunized and Complete for Each Vaccine Series, 2019—2025.



Since the 2020–2021 school year (see **Figure 2**) Tennessee has seen a decline in fully immunized kindergartners and differences in coverage in public vs. private schools (**Figure 3**). During the 2025–2026 school year, the percentage of fully immunized kindergartners in Tennessee (92.5%) remained stable from the 2024–2025 school year (92.3%).

Figure 3. Percentage of Kindergarten Students Who Were Fully Immunized by School Type, 2019—2025.

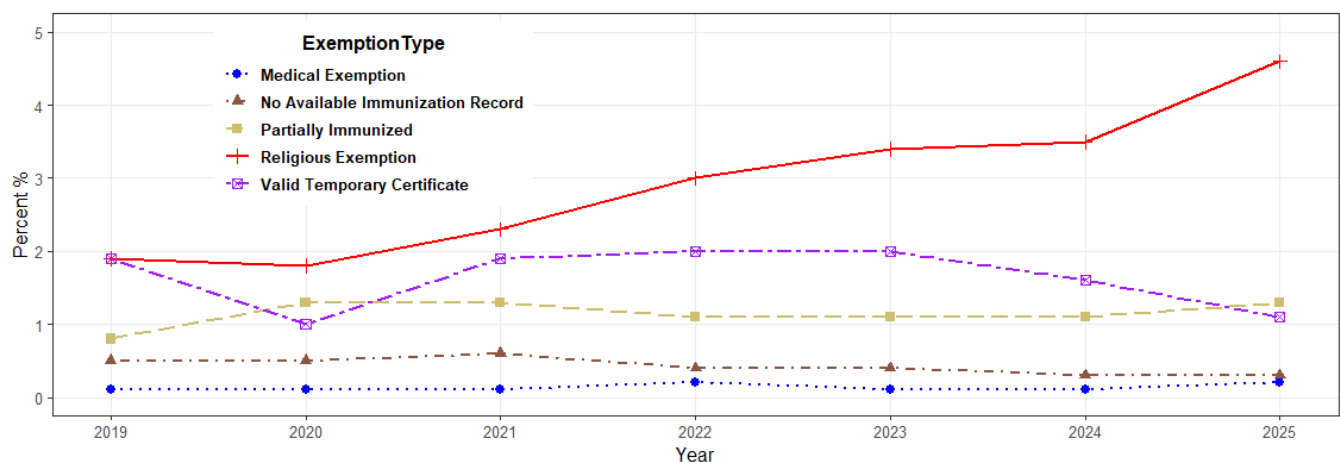


Kindergarten Students Not Fully Immunized

Figure 4 (2019 to 2025) and **Table 1** (2025–2026 school year) show the percentage of kindergarten students who were not fully immunized by category (e.g., partial immunizations, exemptions, certificates, and no available immunization records) from 2019–2025. During the 2025–2026 school year, 1.3% of kindergarteners were partially immunized (i.e., they were missing at least 1 of the required immunizations), 4.6% had documented religious exemptions, 0.2% had documented medical exemptions, 1.1% had temporary certificates, and 0.3% of kindergarteners had no official immunization certificate or military record on file.

The percentage of students with a religious exemption has increased annually since 2020 and has reached an all-time high this year at 4.6%. In addition to an increase in religious exemption rates, the percentage of students who were partially immunized (1.3%) and with medical exemptions (0.2%) also increased from last year. The percentage of students with missing records remained stable at 0.3%. The percentage of students who received temporary certificates decreased to 1.1%. These trends describe a substantial and increasing proportion of kindergartners who are not fully immunized. This is expected to place Tennessee children, schools, and communities at increasing risk for vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks.

Figure 4. Percentage of All Kindergarten Students Not Fully Immunized by Category, 2019—2025.



Where statuses are defined as: Partially Immunized: The student has received some immunizations but is not up to date for all required vaccines and does not have any documented certificates or exemptions; Religious Exemption: The parents or guardian have submitted a signed statement that vaccination conflicts with their religious tenets or practices; Medical Exemption: The parents or guardian have submitted a note/form from their child's physician indicating that their child is medically exempt from specific vaccines due to risk of harm; Valid Temporary Certificate: The student has not received all required vaccines but is in the process of obtaining them; No Available Immunization Record: The student has no official immunization certificate or military record on file.

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF TENNESSEE KINDERGARTNERS NOT FULLY IMMUNIZED BY IMMUNIZATION STATUS CATEGORY FOR THE 2024–2025 AND 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEARS

Immunization Status Category	2024–2025	2025–2026
Partially Immunized	1.1%	1.3%
Religious Exemption	3.5%	4.6%
Medical Exemption	0.1%	0.2%
Valid Temporary Certificate	1.6%	1.1%
No Available Immunization Records	0.3%	0.3%

Where statuses are defined as: Partially Immunized: the student is not up to date for all required vaccines and does not have any documented certificates or exemptions; Religious Exemption: the parents or guardian of a child have submitted a signed statement that vaccination conflicts with their religious tenets or practices; Medical Exemption: the parents or guardian have submitted a note/form from the child’s physicians (i.e., MD, DO) and/or Public Health Nurse indicating that the child is medically exempt from specific vaccines due to risk of harm. Other vaccines remain required. The medical reason for the exemption does not need to be provided; Valid Temporary Certificate: a child has not received all required vaccines but is in the process of obtaining them. Temporary certificates expire one month after the date the next required immunization is due, according to the minimum acceptable (“catch-up”) dose interval per the CDC/ACIP schedule. An expired temporary certificate is not valid proof of immunization; No Available Immunization Records: the student has no official immunization certificate or military record on file.

County Coverage

A 95.0% coverage rate is widely considered the threshold needed to provide herd immunity for highly contagious diseases like measles. Certain communities and counties in Tennessee are expected to be at higher risk for outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases due to immunization coverage rates falling below 95.0%.

Tennessee has set a statewide goal of having 95.0% of kindergarteners fully immunized with all required vaccinations based on the threshold for herd immunity for highly infectious diseases like measles. During the 2025–2026 school year, only 17.0% of Tennessee counties (16 of 94 reporting counties) met this 95.0% immunization coverage goal for the full kindergarten series across public and private schools (e.g., “fully immunized”, **Figure 5**). In the other 78 counties that fell below the 95.0% immunization coverage goal, 67.0% (63 of 94 reporting counties) had an immunization coverage between 90.0% and 95.0% and 16.0% (15 of 94 reporting counties) had an immunization coverage below 90.0%. During the 2024-2025 school year, 15.0% of Tennessee counties (14 of 93 reporting counties) met the 95.0% immunization coverage rate goal among kindergarteners, 68.8% (64 of 93 reporting counties) had an immunization coverage between 90.0% and 95.0%, and 16.1% (15 of 94

reporting counties) had an immunization coverage below 90.0%. In counties with immunization coverage rates below 90.0%, a highly infectious disease like measles could spread easily among unvaccinated students if introduced into a classroom.

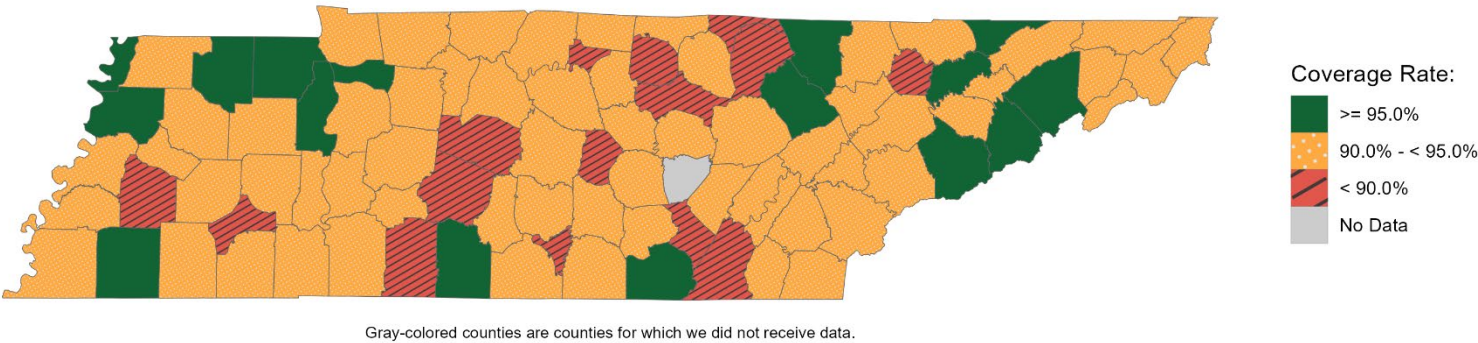
While the number of counties above the 95.0% threshold remained stable from the 2024–2025 to 2025–2026 school years, current data represents a notable downward trend from the 2019–2020 school year when 72 counties (76.0%) were above the 95% threshold. Below, **Table 2** shows percentage of counties with immunization rates of at least 95.0%, between 90.0% and 95.0%, and below 90.0% for the current year and the previous 7 surveys. County-level immunization rates, including comparisons of public and private school coverage by county are shown in **Figures 5- 7**.

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF COUNTIES WITH IMMUNIZATION COVERAGE RATES OF AT LEAST 95.0%, FROM 90.0% TO LESS THAN 95.0%, AND LESS THAN 90.0% FROM 2019 TO 2025

Fully Immunized Students (Public and Private)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
At least 95.0%	76.0%	67.0%	45.0%	27.0%	34.0%	15.0%	17.0%
From 90.0% to less than 95.0%	20.0%	27.0%	48.0%	66.0%	55.0%	67.0%	67.0%
Less than 90.0%	4.0%	5.0%	6.0%	6.0%	11.0%	15.0%	16.0%

County-level full kindergarten immunization coverage (e.g., “fully immunized”) varies widely across Tennessee, ranging from 73.9% in Fentress County to 100.0% in Hancock County. It is important to note that the number of public and private schools varies by county, and not all counties include data from private schools. For more detailed information on the number of schools, student enrollment, and immunization rates by county, refer to **Table 1** of **Appendix 1** (*pending*).

Figure 5. Percentage of All Kindergarten Students Who Were Fully Immunized by County 2025—2026.



Public and Private School Statewide Summary and Comparisons

Public School Summary:

There were 1,010 public schools eligible for participation during the 2025–2026 Kindergarten Survey, of which 978 (96.8%) responded. Statewide, 92.8% of public-school kindergartners were fully immunized at the time of the survey. **Tables 3 and 4** below show the coverage rate for each vaccination series as well as the percentage of students with partial immunizations, exemptions, or no available vaccination records compared to the prior school year. **Figure 6** shows the percentage of fully immunized public-school kindergartners by county. 19.4% (18 of 93 reporting counties) had an immunization coverage rate of at least 95.0%, 64.5% (60 of 93 reporting counties) had an immunization coverage rate between 90.0% and 95.0%, and 16.1% (15 of 93 reporting counties) had an immunization coverage rate below 90.0%.

TABLE 3. COMPARISON OF PUBLIC-SCHOOL STUDENTS' COVERAGE RATES FOR EACH VACCINE SERIES FOR THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR WITH THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR

Vaccine Series	2025–2026	2024–2025
Fully Immunized	92.8%	92.6%
DTaP	94.4%	94.2%
HepB	95.8%*	95.5%
MMR	94.7%	94.7%
Polio	94.4%	94.4%
Varicella	94.5%	94.4%
HepA	94.6%*	94.2%

*Differences were significant at $p<0.05$

TABLE 4. COMPARISON OF PUBLIC-SCHOOL STUDENTS' IMMUNIZATION STATUS RATES FOR THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR WITH THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR

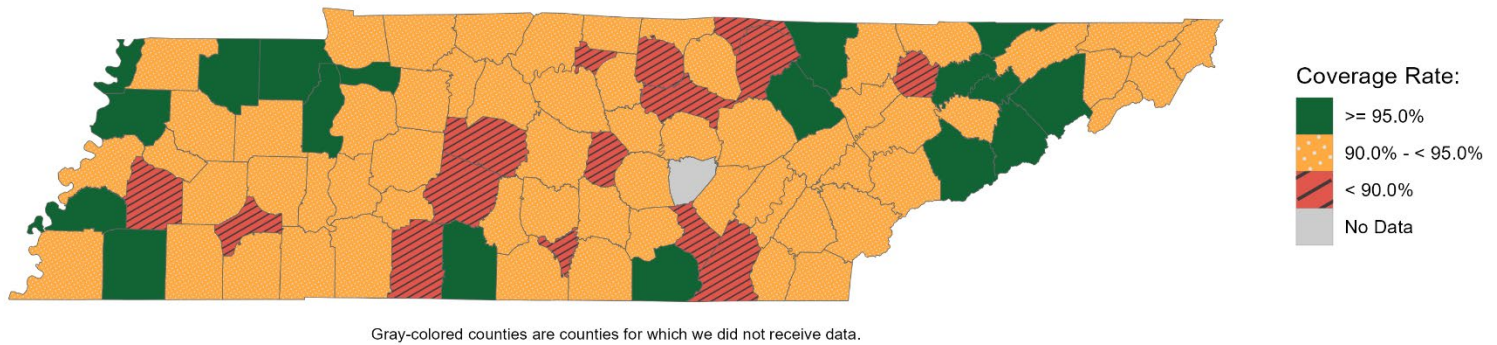
Immunization Status	2025–2026	2024–2025
Partially Immunized	1.2%*	1.0%
Religious Exemption	4.4%*	3.3%
Medical Exemption	0.1%	0.1%
Temporary Certificate	1.2%*	1.6%

No Available Immunization Records	0.3%	0.3%
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Where statuses are defined as: Partially Immunized: the student is not up to date for all required vaccines and does not have any documented certificates or exemptions; Religious Exemption: the parents or guardian of a child have submitted a signed statement that vaccination conflicts with their religious tenets or practices; Medical Exemption: the parents or guardian have submitted a note/form from the child's physicians (i.e., MD, DO) and/or Public Health Nurse indicating that the child is medically exempt from specific vaccines due to risk of harm. Other vaccines remain required. The medical reason for the exemption does not need to be provided; Valid Temporary Certificate: a child has not received all required vaccines but is in the process of obtaining them. Temporary certificates expire one month after the date the next required immunization is due, according to the minimum acceptable ("catch-up") dose interval per the CDC/ACIP schedule. An expired temporary certificate is not valid proof of immunization; No Available Immunization Records: the student has no official immunization certificate or military record on file.

*Differences were significant at $p < 0.05$

Figure 6. Percentage of Public-School Kindergarten Students Who Were Fully Immunized by County, 2025—2026.



Private School Summary:

For the past few years, there has been a decline in the response rate of private schools. During the 2025–2026 school year, 112 (42.4%) of 264 private schools responded, down from a 52.9% private school response rate last year.

Statewide, 88.2% of kindergartners enrolled in participating private schools were fully immunized at the time of the survey. Unlike public schools, where student rosters are provided by the Department of Education, private schools do not have centralized enrollment lists. Thus, this survey is not able to document the number of private school students with immunization certificates validated by TennIIS. Overall, around 6.0% of kindergartners participating in the survey were enrolled in private schools during the 2025–2026 school year.

Tables 5 and 6 show the coverage rate for each vaccination series as well as the percentage of students with partial immunizations, exemptions, or no available immunizations records compared to the prior school year. **Figure 7** shows the percentage of fully immunized private-school kindergarteners by county.

TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF PRIVATE-SCHOOL STUDENTS' COVERAGE RATES FOR EACH VACCINE SERIES FOR THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR WITH THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR

Vaccine Series	2025–2026	2024–2025
Fully Immunized	88.2%	87.2%
DTaP	89.8%	89.2%
HepB	92.6%	91.8%
MMR	89.0%	88.8%
Polio	89.8%	89.3%
Varicella	89.1%	88.9%
HepA	91.6%	91.1%

No differences were significant at $p<0.05$

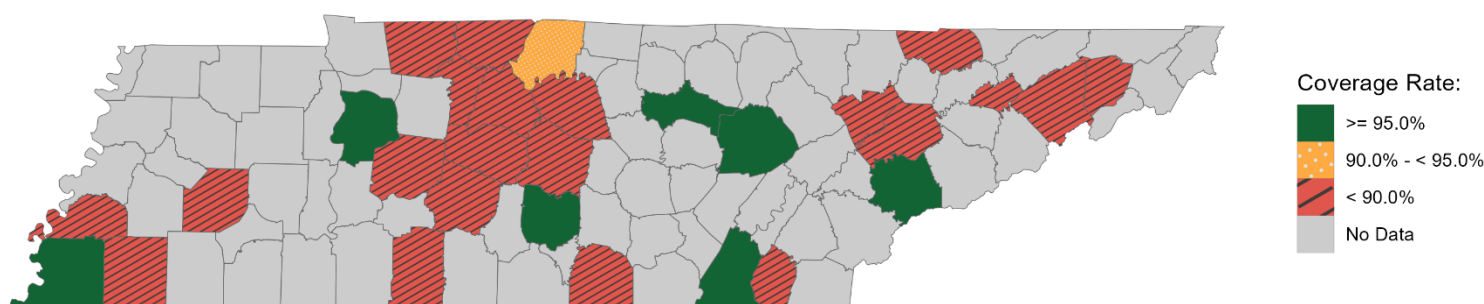
TABLE 6. COMPARISON OF PRIVATE-SCHOOL STUDENTS' IMMUNIZATION STATUS RATES FOR THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR WITH THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR

Immunization Status	2025–2026	2024–2025
Partially Immunized	2.0%	2.5%
Religious Exemption	8.4%	8.9%
Medical Exemption	0.3%	0.2%
Temporary Certificate	0.5%	0.5%
No Available Immunization Records	0.6%	0.4%

Where statuses are defined as: Partially Immunized: the student is not up to date for all required vaccines and does not have any documented certificates or exemptions; Religious Exemption: the parents or guardian of a child have submitted a signed statement that vaccination conflicts with their religious tenets or practices; Medical Exemption: the parents or guardian have submitted a note/form from the child's physicians (i.e., MD, DO) and/or Public Health Nurse indicating that the child is medically exempt from specific vaccines due to risk of harm. Other vaccines remain required. The medical reason for the exemption does not need to be provided; Valid Temporary Certificate: a child has not received all required vaccines but is in the process of obtaining them. Temporary certificates expire one month after the date the next required immunization is due, according to the minimum acceptable ("catch-up") dose interval per the CDC/ACIP schedule. An expired temporary certificate is not valid proof of immunization; No Available Immunization Records: the student has no official immunization certificate or military record on file.

No differences were significant at $p < 0.05$

Figure 7. Percentage of Private School Kindergarten Students Who Were Fully Immunized by County, 2025—2026.



Gray-colored counties are counties for which we did not receive data. Please also note that 106 out of 264 private schools completed the 2025-2026 Kindergarten Survey; this may influence the percentage of students fully immunized within each county.

Public and Private School Comparisons:

Tables 7 and 8 show the coverage rate for each vaccination series as well as the percentage of students with partial immunizations, exemptions, or no available immunizations records in public schools compared to private schools for the 2025–2026 school year. In the 2025–2026 school year, public schools had significantly higher coverage rates for all vaccines in the kindergarten series compared to private schools. Private schools had significantly more students with religious exemptions (8.4%) compared to public schools (4.4%). When comparing public school and private school rates, it is important to note that the gap in response rates between public schools (96.8%) and private schools (42.4%) may contribute to observed differences. Additionally, factors that influence a school’s willingness to participate may also act as confounders, as differences in participation and the characteristics of schools that choose to participate could contribute to the observed differences in results.

TABLE 7. COMPARISON OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE-SCHOOL STUDENTS' COVERAGE RATES FOR EACH VACCINE IN THE KINDERGARTEN SERIES FOR THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR

Vaccine Series	Public School	Private School
Fully Immunized	92.8%	88.2%*
DTaP	94.4%	89.8%*
HepB	95.8%	92.6%*
MMR	94.7%	89.0%*
Polio	94.4%	89.8%*
Varicella	94.5%	89.1%*
HepA	94.6%	91.6%*

*Differences were significant at $p<0.05$

TABLE 8. COMPARISON OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE-SCHOOL STUDENTS' IMMUNIZATION STATUS RATES FOR THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR

Immunization Status	Public School	Private School
Partially Immunized	1.2%	2.0%*
Religious Exemption	4.4%	8.4%*
Medical Exemption	0.1%	0.3%*
Temporary Certificate	1.2%	0.5%*
No Available Immunization Records	0.3%	0.6%*

Where statuses are defined as: Partially Immunized: the student is not up to date for all required vaccines and does not have any documented certificates or exemptions; Religious Exemption: the parents or guardian of a child have submitted a signed statement that vaccination conflicts with their religious tenets or practices; Medical Exemption: the parents or guardian have submitted a note/form from the child's physicians (i.e., MD, DO) and/or Public Health Nurse indicating that the child is medically exempt from specific vaccines due to risk of harm. Other vaccines remain required. The medical reason for the exemption does not need to be provided; Valid Temporary Certificate: a child has not received all required vaccines but is in the process of obtaining them. Temporary certificates expire one month after the date the next required immunization is due, according to the minimum acceptable ("catch-up") dose interval per the CDC/ACIP schedule. An expired temporary certificate is not valid proof of immunization; No Available Immunization Records: the student has no official immunization certificate or military record on file.

*Differences were significant at $p<0.05$

Conclusion

Overall, 92.5% of kindergarteners in Tennessee were fully immunized and 7.5% had documented exemptions for the 2025–2026 school year. Coverage rates varied significantly between public and private schools, with 92.8% of kindergartners at public schools and 88.2% at private schools being fully immunized.

Over the past several years, this survey has identified trends of increased vaccine exemptions and decreased immunization coverage and protection for Tennessee children. To reduce risks for Tennessee kindergarteners from vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks, improving and maintaining vaccine coverage rates is imperative. Efforts to increase education and build public trust in vaccines, support coordinated action among communities, healthcare providers, and public health officials, are essential for maintaining safe school environments for all children. Tennessee's medical providers are trusted sources of information about childhood diseases and immunizations. Medical providers are encouraged to utilize TennIIS to review immunization records and provide catch-up immunizations at every opportunity. Thank you for partnering with us to inform and protect Tennessee communities and children.

Questions and comments regarding this report or the Kindergarten Survey may be directed to School.Imm@tn.gov.

Sincerely,



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