

# Georgia Immunization Registry (GRITS)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How do I...

#### **...Obtain a copy of my immunization records?**

To request an immunization record from GRITS:

Please use the [Immunization Record Request Form](#) located under the **Forms** heading on the Department of Public Health's Georgia Immunization Registry's page. Please follow the instructions on the form for returning your request to GRITS.

*Please Note:* GRITS only contain the recorded immunization history entered by your previous and current Georgia healthcare providers. If you've had immunizations in Georgia since the inception of the registry in 2003, there's a good chance those immunizations have been recorded into the GRITS database. In which case, the Immunization Record Request Form is the best tool to request your records. If you have not had immunizations in Georgia since 2003, please read below:

You may try contacting:

- The last physician or health care facility where you had immunizations administered
- The last schools you attended that may have your immunization record with your transcripts
- The insurance carrier that covered you at the time of the immunizations
- If you've worked in the healthcare industry, your employer may have immunization records in your file
- Military administration, if you received immunizations during time of service
- Or, you may have serology (titer / blood) tests done to determine which immunizations you have already received.

Some situations/circumstances require other pertinent documentation; (adoptions, guardianship, custody, etc. issues) in those cases, please contact our office for further instruction at (404) 463-0810.

#### **...Register to become a user of GRITS?**

Thank you for desiring to partner with the Georgia Immunization Registry known as GRITS. To gain access to the information contained in the GRITS system you must complete an online registration form, found on the GRITS main page [www.GRITS.state.ga.us](http://www.GRITS.state.ga.us).

You will be asked to provide the following information:

1. Organization Name
2. Organization Address
3. Organization Phone Number
4. Organization Point of Contact (POC) Name
5. Organization POC Phone/Fax Number
6. Organization POC E-Mail Address
7. Organization Administrator Name
8. Organization Administrator Phone/Fax Number
9. Organization Administrator E-Mail Address

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Once you have accepted the User Agreement and Confidentiality Policy and submitted a completed New Organization form, a GRITS Analyst will process your request and coordinate with the Immunization Regional Consultant (IRC) assigned to contact you regarding scheduling for training on how to navigate the GRITS system.

Please allow between 5 -10 business days for your assigned IRC to contact you and schedule your GRITS Training. During your GRITS Training Session, you will be given an Organization Code, individual Username, and Password to gain access to the information contained within the GRITS System.

## General Questions

### What is GRITS?

The Georgia Registry of Immunization Transactions and Services, better known as GRITS, is the Immunization Information System developed to comply with Georgia Law (OCGA 32-12-3.1). Immunization registries are confidential, computerized information systems that contain information about immunizations and clients of all ages. Individuals typically are entered into a registry at birth (often through a linkage with electronic birth records) or at first contact with the health-care system. If a registry includes all individuals in a given geographical area and all providers are reporting immunization information, a registry can provide a single data source for all community immunization partners.

### How do providers submit data to the Registry?

GRITS accepts client/immunization files in a batch flat file, batch HL7 or real time HL7 upload. Batch uploads are manual processes. It requires logging into GRITS and manually uploading each file. Real time interfacing is automated. We now offer two options. The first option is to utilize the CDC product, PHINMS. This software is installed on your server and will look into the file/database you assign and check (at whatever time interval you choose) for changes/updates. When it finds an update, PHINMS is able to communicate with GRITS and give us that update without any human interference. The second option is a Web Service. GRITS will provide you and your EMR with the appropriate WSDL that will assist in the formatting stages of the Web Service Portal of your choice.

### Are providers required to enter the shot history of existing patients?

Providers are required to enter information for shots they administer. However, a complete immunization history can offer key benefits, such as calculation of immunization rates, accurate precall/recall and automated school certificates. Entry of immunization histories benefits all providers who can access the records through GRITS, therefore avoiding administration of duplicate immunizations.

### Can medical office staff enter records into the Registry?

Yes. The provider accepts the responsibility for the submission of immunization records according to the requirements of the registry legislation, and he/she may authorize additional members of the office staff to enter the records.

### Is training available for providers?

Yes. Once an organization has been enrolled in GRITS, the Training Coordinator will contact the Immunization Program Consultant (IPC) for their district and arrange onsite training for the provider and staff.

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## **Is there a Help Desk to assist providers?**

Yes. GRITS has a Help Desk which is available to all users between the hours of 8 AM and 5 PM Monday through Friday at (866) 483-2958. Users can also submit questions and suggestions to the Registry Help Desk via e-mail: [dph-gaimmreg@dph.ga.gov](mailto:dph-gaimmreg@dph.ga.gov).

## **What hours will GRITS be available?**

The GRITS site is available to all users 24 hours per day seven days a week. GRITS staff are available Monday - Friday 8:00am to 5:00 pm.

## **How will the accuracy of the data in GRITS be validated?**

When data is submitted, the GRITS system has various "edit checks" and de-duplication processes that are automatically executed to ensure the validity of the data. In some instances, it may be necessary to verify the information with the submitter. Care should be taken that information is entered accurately and completely.

## **Who is responsible for the loading of history data?**

GRITS is equipped with multiple means of loading historical data. The first method is for the existing system utilized by the physician to transmit data securely using an NCIRD, HIPAA compliant HL7 immunization transaction set. A second method is to work with GRITS and coordinate the creation of a legacy load Flat File data transfer. If the historical data can be loaded electronically, then the registry team will work with the organization to extract the data and load it into GRITS. The organization is expected to work with the registry team to ensure that the data is accurate prior to loading it into the registry and to assist in verifying that the data loaded successfully.

## **Will GRITS interface with my existing Practice Management System or Medical Records Management System?**

GRITS is willing to work with any vendor who desires to build an interface solution with the Registry. Click here to view a one page summary of various [data exchange](#) options available. Please contact the GRITS Interface Team at 404-463-0808, 404-463-0806 or e-mail to: [dph-immreg@dph.ga.gov](mailto:dph-immreg@dph.ga.gov) to inquire if your vendor has developed a certified interface with GRITS.

## **When should providers have to submit data to the Registry?**

The Georgia Department of Public Health has identified 30 calendar days as the maximum time that a provider is allowed to delay submitting shot information to GRITS.

## **Parents and Children**

For parents and children, Immunization registries:

- Consolidate in central location all immunizations a child has received;
- Provide an accurate, official copy of a child's immunization history for personal, child care, school, or camp entry requirements;
- Help ensure that a child's immunizations are up to date;
- Provide reminders when an immunization is due;
- Provide reminders when an immunization has been missed;
- Help ensure timely immunization for children whose families move or switch health-care providers; and
- Prevent unnecessary (duplicative) immunization.

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For communities, Immunization registries:

- Help control vaccine-preventable diseases;
- Help identify high-risk and under-immunized populations;
- Help prevent disease outbreaks;
- Provide information on community and state coverage rates; and streamline vaccine management.

## **Who must submit immunization information to the Georgia Immunization Registry?**

The Georgia Code 31-12-3.1, which took effect July 1, 1996 and House Bill 1526, which took effect July 1, 2004 states:

Any person who administers a vaccine or vaccines licensed for use by the United States Food and Drug Administration to a person shall, for each such vaccination, provide to the department such data as are deemed by the department to be necessary and appropriate for purposes of the vaccination registry established pursuant to subsection (a) of this Code section, including, without limitation.

Vaccination data reporting requirements, including without limitation the types of data required to be reported and the time and manner of reporting such data, shall begin after the registry has established linkages to vaccine providers and shall be established by the department in consultation with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Georgia chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians.

## **Who can receive a copy of an individual's immunization record from the Georgia Immunization registry?**

The Georgia Code 31-12-3.1, which took effect July 1, 1996 and House Bill 1526, which took effect July 1, 2004 state:

Individually identifiable vaccination information regarding a person may be provided to the department by, or released by the department to, a local health department, hospital, physician, or other provider of medical services to the person or to a school or child care facility in which the person is enrolled if the person is 18 years of age or younger, without the consent of the person or the persons parents or guardians. All children shall be enrolled unless a specific exemption is requested by the person or person's parent or guardian if the person is 18 years of age or younger. A person or person's parent or guardian if the person is 18 years of age or younger may obtain, and upon request to the department, shall be provided with all individually identifiable vaccination registry information regarding his or her child or ward. Except as provided otherwise by this Code section, individually identifiable vaccination registry information shall be treated as confidential and shall not be released to a third party without consent of the person or person's parent or guardian if the person is 18 years of age or younger.

Nothing in this Code section shall:

- (1) Prohibit the department from providing or publishing registry information in aggregate form for scientific, educational, or public health purposes, provided that such information is published without releasing or identifying individual names contained in the registry;
- (2) Prohibit the department or any medical services provider from notifying the person or person's parent or guardian if the person is 18 years of age or younger, of the person's vaccination status or of a vaccination that is due or overdue according to recommended vaccination schedules; or
- (3) Diminish a parent or guardian's responsibility for having a child vaccinated properly.

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## **Can I be held liable for the information that I release to or receive from the Georgia Immunization Registry?**

The Georgia Code 31-12-3.1, which took effect July 1, 1996 and House Bill 1526, which took effect July 1, 2004 state:

Any person, including but not limited to, practitioners of the healing arts, submitting or obtaining in good faith vaccination reports or data to or from the department in compliance with the provisions of this Code section and any rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to this Code section shall not be liable for any civil damages therefore.

## **What if parents do not want their child's record in GRITS?**

As an Opt Out State, the Registry Law allows authorized parents or guardians to exempt their children from the registry. They will have the responsibility of completing an [Opt Out Form/ Opt Out Form – Spanish](#) to initiate their request. These forms are available to all public and private providers. Parents will have the option of re-registering their child if they change their mind at a later date.

## **What happens to the patient's data if they choose to Opt Out and then Opt Back into the Registry?**

The information will have to be re-entered from the immunization history record provided by the parent. When an authorized parent or guardian selects to remove their child from the registry, all immunization information is removed from the registry. The parents will have the responsibility of completing a Opt In Form to initiate the enrollment process. Parents should also submit an updated immunization record along with the request. [Opt In Form/ Opt In Form - Spanish](#).

## **Provider Participation and Enrollment**

### **Who benefits from participating in GRITS?**

Any provider who administers a vaccine in the State of Georgia, including:

- Pediatricians
- Family Practitioners
- Pharmacies
- Internal Medicine physicians
- Immunologists
- In-Hospital providers who request immunizations for newborns or other children
- Public Health staff
- Emergency Room physicians
- Military base physicians
- Juvenile detention centers/prisons

### **We provide only tetanus and flu shots in our office. Do we still have to report to GRITS?**

Yes. According to the Registry Law, any immunization administered in the State of Georgia must be reported to the Registry. The Registry will also be a source of information available to consult before administering your tetanus and flu shots, helping to avoid unnecessary duplicates.

### **Are fees associated with participation in the Registry?**

There is no charge for participating. Providers who choose to access GRITS will need to obtain an Internet account from an Internet Service Provider.

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## **What support staff will be available to assist providers?**

GRITS has a Help Desk which is available to all users of the Registry between the hours of 8 AM and 5 PM Monday through Friday at (866) 483-2958. Users can also submit questions to the Help Desk via the e-mail: [dph-gaimmreg@dph.ga.gov](mailto:dph-gaimmreg@dph.ga.gov).

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

### **What is being done to protect the confidentiality of patients?**

The Georgia Department of Public Health has developed GRITS to meet HIPAA privacy and security requirements.

Only providers of immunizations will be able to directly access a child's immunization records. Parents or guardians may obtain a child's immunization records from their physician, public health department or by requesting the record from GRITS. The Registry Law allows for the sharing of immunization records with schools. For a school to gain access to a child's immunization record, the school must sign a Software Use Agreement and agree to handle all immunization information as identified under the HIPAA guidelines.

Through built-in system security features, only providers and related users are able to directly access a patient's record. When searching for an individual record, providers are not able to view more than a limited number of records while attempting to identify their unique patient. Search criteria for an individual patient requires specific and accurate information and search results will yield a limited number of matches in order to further protect confidentiality.

Additionally, each user of the registry will have to read and sign an End User Agreement stating that they understand that the information in GRITS is confidential and that they will be penalized if they violate that confidentiality or in any way abuse the information to which they have access. Each user of the system has to have an individual user account and password. All access to the system and every transaction is recorded and such records will be reviewed and audited.

### **How are the electronic records kept secure?**

The security of the data on the computer and of electronic transactions over the Internet - is part of a comprehensive security plan. The computers are housed in a secured room to protect the equipment. The Department has a computer firewall that severely restricts access to the Department's computer network. On-line users are trained how to access the system and use a personalized user ID and password assigned to them.

### **How will the security work for the system Electronic Medical Records (EMR) that uses VPN, and how does it relate to HL7?**

Accessing the Registry via a VPN meets the HIPAA requirements for secured connections. GRITS uses Security Certificate technology to establish a secure link between the VPN connection and the Registry WEB server. Security Certificate technology provides 128-Bit encryption and validation of secured transmissions. The purpose for selecting and encouraging the use of the HL7 Immunization transaction sets for all interface and communications is because HL7 is national standard protocol identified by the CDC to meet HIPAA communications

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privacy and security requirements. The HL7 protocol provides a secure environment by which Personal Health Information can be shared.

## Registry Benefits

### What are the benefits for providers who participate in the Registry?

Benefits include the following:

- Reduces staff time searching for records
- Enables providers to determine whether patients are due or overdue and send reminders to parents.
- Clarifies immunization schedules and emerging vaccine combinations.
- Generates immunization certificates for schools and child care facilities
- Reduces over immunizing clients in Georgia.

### How will the Registry help with school and child care facility certificates?

GRITS allows providers to print all required immunization certificates. According to state law, a physician licensed in Georgia, a public health nurse, or designated State immunization personnel must certify the certificates. GRITS also allows schools to access the Registry to determine a child's immunization status.

## Assessment of Vaccination Status

### [Vaccines For Children \(VFC\)](#)

#### Does GRITS interact with the Vaccines for Children (VFC)?

Yes. GRITS interacts with the VFC program. When a provider utilizes the full capabilities of the Registry, the provider is able to manage his or her complete VFC vaccine inventory. The provider will be able to electronically report monthly vaccine usage to the VFC program office.

#### Can one site access inventory at another site?

Yes, provided both sites are affiliated with the same organization