

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- August is National Immunization Awareness Month, and Washtenaw County Public Health is encouraging people of all ages to get their recommended vaccines. MLive ran [several articles](#) as a result of information staff provided.
- Washtenaw County ranks first among Michigan counties for vaccinating children against seasonal flu – but near the bottom (66 of 84 counties) for fully vaccinating 13- to 17-year-olds.
- Washtenaw County has a higher percentage of parents waiving recommended vaccines for their school-age children (8%) than other Michigan counties (average of 6%).
- Washtenaw County saw nearly 200 cases of pertussis, or whooping cough, last year, and another 56 cases have been reported as of July 14 this year. Unfortunately, 26% of school-age children are not fully vaccinated against pertussis.

Immunizations

Immunizations have had an enormous impact on improving the health of individuals in the United States. Most people today have never seen first-hand the devastating consequences that vaccine-preventable diseases have on a family or community. While these diseases are not common in the U.S., they persist around the world and may be only a plane ride away.

Vaccination is one of the best ways we can protect ourselves and our families from 16 potentially harmful diseases (Diphtheria, Haemophilus influenza b, Hepatitis A and B, Human Papillomavirus, Influenza, Measles, Meningococcal Disease, Mumps, Pertussis, Pneumococcal Disease, Poliomyelitis, Rotavirus, Rubella, Tetanus, and Varicella). We are also protecting our community, as there are always individuals who may be at high risk for one or more of these diseases. These include the very young and old, and people who have poor immunity or who for health reasons can't be vaccinated. It also includes some people who were vaccinated, but who didn't develop good immunity.

As the number of vaccine-preventable diseases decrease, some individuals are becoming more fearful of vaccines than of the diseases themselves. The U.S. currently has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in history. Years of testing are required by law before a vaccine can be licensed. Once in use, vaccines are continually monitored for safety and efficacy. The immunization program staff at Washtenaw County Public Health play a key role in helping to ensure the safety and efficacy of vaccines through proper vaccine storage and handling, timing and spacing of vaccine doses, observations of precautions and contraindications, communication about vaccine benefit and risk, and reporting of suspected side effects.

What is WCPH doing to address this issue?

- Washtenaw County Public Health offers vaccines to children and adults regardless of insurance status or income. WCPH administered 3,745 doses of vaccine in 2013.
- Staff review immunization rates quarterly to determine trends and to plan for education and outreach.
- Public Health Nurses monitor school immunization records. Students are required to submit records to schools, and schools are required to report the number of students fully vaccinated and the number of students who have a signed vaccine waiver from a parent.
- Staff monitor vaccine storage and handling of the 36 Vaccine for Children providers within the County.
- Immunization Nurse Educators provide free immunization education to physician offices and their staff.
- Our Medical Director and nursing staff participate in the Washtenaw Immunization Action Coalition, whose goal is to increase vaccination rates among all ages. The group includes representatives from hospitals, pharmacies, physicians offices and senior homes.
- Our Medical Director, with support from the local county medical society, brought a proposal to the Michigan State Medical Society to amend the Michigan Public Health Code to allow only medical and religious waivers for vaccinations among schoolchildren. She is also working with the Michigan Association of Public Health and Preventive Medicine Physicians (MAPPP) in their effort to require all parents who wish to sign non-medical immunization waivers for their children to receive education first at the local public health level.
- Our Medical Director and immunization staff have created provider report cards that will be sent to local medical providers twice each year. These report cards will inform providers of their rank among other area providers in terms of immunization coverage for children.

For more information:

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