

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Immunization waivers are needed when a parent or guardian skips one or more of the vaccinations required for children entering school or childcare settings. Michigan has one of the highest waiver rates in the country.
- Washtenaw County has a higher waiver rate (8%) than other Michigan counties (average of 6%).
- Rules concerning immunization waivers in Michigan changed at the end of 2014, with a large impact on local public health departments.

New Rules for Vaccine Waivers

Michigan Public Health Law requires that all children entering school or childcare settings receive certain basic vaccinations or obtain a valid waiver for vaccinations refused. Immunization is checked every fall for all licensed childcare, preschool, and Head Start students. In addition, immunization is checked at the beginning of the school year for kindergarteners, seventh graders, and all newly enrolled students into the school district. This requirement applies to both public and private school students.

The rules concerning immunization waivers for schools and child care centers recently changed. As of January 1, 2015, parents still have the right to refuse required vaccinations for their children. However, to obtain nonmedical waivers (those based on religious, philosophical or other objections to receiving required vaccines), parents must:

- Receive scientific-based education and resources from the local health department about vaccines and the diseases they are intended to prevent.
- Sign a State of Michigan Immunization Waiver Form that includes a statement of acknowledgement that parents understand they may be putting their own children and others at risk by refusing the immunizations. The form must be signed and stamped by the local health department once education is provided.

Parents and guardians seeking nonmedical waivers for their children may only obtain the waivers directly from the local health department. This requirement also extends to the guardians of exchange students from foreign countries. Medical waivers are still allowed under the rules, and will still be obtained from physician offices.

Washtenaw County has a high rate of nonmedical waivers, with 8% of all children enrolled in school or day care last year having a waiver. The vast majority of these waivers are for nonmedical reasons, translating into about 1,200 waivers per year.

What is WCPH doing to address this issue?

- WCPH has begun scheduling appointments with parents and guardians for vaccine education. Nurses from our immunization clinic will be presenting the information, and will be offering immunization for children of parents who change their minds after the education. The Vaccines for Children program is available free of charge for low income families without health insurance.
- WCPH is starting with children who have transferred to a new school at the beginning of 2015. As we meet with this first group, we will test, evaluate and refine our education module. Our nurses will also receive state-sponsored waiver education training.
- We are working with the school districts and childcare centers to inform them of the new rules. Together we can educate families about the importance of vaccination and decrease the risk of disease in our children and community.

For more information:

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