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Preliminary data shows a statewide decrease in school-age vaccine waiver rates

LANSING, Mich. – As a result of a rule change in January 2015 related to non-medical vaccination waivers, preliminary data show that Michigan has seen a 39 percent decrease in the number of waivers submitted this year compared to the same time last year.

In 2014, Michigan had the 6th highest immunization waiver rate in the country with more than five percent of kindergarten children not vaccinated with all required vaccines. All Michigan Kindergarteners, 7th grade students, and students moving from one school district to another are required to be up to date on certain immunizations or have a signed immunization waiver. High waiver rates result in more children susceptible to serious vaccine preventable diseases.

To address the high waiver rates in Michigan, a new rule went into effect in January of 2015 that requires parents seeking a non-medical waiver for their child's vaccinations to meet with local health department staff before obtaining the waiver. Previously the waiver could be obtained from the school and signed by the parent at the time of school enrollment.

“By ensuring that parents have the opportunity to address and discuss concerns with their local health department, we’re providing parents with knowledge they can use when making a decision about vaccinating their child,” said Nick Lyon, director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. “Michigan’s local health departments have been instrumental in working with and educating parents who have had concerns about vaccines and I applaud them for their understanding, assistance and dedication.”

So far this school year, there have been nearly 8,000 fewer vaccination waivers for children entering Michigan’s schools. The Kindergarten waiver rate has dropped from 5.18 percent to 3.32 percent; the 7th grade rate has dropped from 4.55 percent to 2.78 percent; and the rate for new students to a school district has dropped from 4.28 percent to 2.47 percent.

“This improvement in our vaccination coverage rates means that more kids are protected from outbreaks and serious vaccine-preventable diseases,” said Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive for the MDHHS. “Unfortunately we have not eradicated some very serious diseases that affect children and adults alike. We continue to see outbreaks of pertussis, (whooping cough) and chickenpox in areas of Michigan as well as nationwide.”

MDHHS will continue to monitor waiver rates and immunization coverage levels. For more information about Michigan’s vaccine or waiver rates, visit www.michigan.gov/immunize.

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