



Stronger Childhood Immunization Laws Needed in Minnesota

2019 policy position

Vaccines prevent serious illness and save lives. Decades of research support this truth and yet Minnesota continues to have weak immunization laws that put the health of our children at risk. Allowing non-medical, personal belief exemptions decreases immunization rates and increases the risk for outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease. Minnesota's immunization laws must be strengthened to protect our children and their future.

The Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MNAAP) supports all efforts to strengthen immunization laws and eliminate personal belief, non-medical exemptions in Minnesota.

- **In Minnesota, under-vaccination is not isolated to a single location, region or community.** Several Minnesota communities and schools have high rates of non-medical exemptions, putting them at high risk for outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. In Wadena and Renville counties, over 10 percent of kindergartners were not fully vaccinated before the start of the 2017-2018 school year because of non-medical exemptions. In Minneapolis, there are schools where MMR immunization rates are very concerning, including one school where less than 50 percent of kindergartners have been vaccinated against measles.
- **Vaccination coverage rates for our children are too low.** According to the Centers for Disease Control, 7-series vaccination coverage for Minnesota children between 19 and 35 months old in 2017 was just 66 percent, among the lowest rates in the country.
- **Strong immunization laws are effective.** Data from states that have eliminated the personal belief exemptions demonstrate that it is an effective method to increase immunization rates and decrease the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases. After California eliminated the personal belief exemption in 2015, the percentage of children entering kindergarten with required vaccines increased nearly 5 percent to 95 percent during the 2017-2018 school year.
- **Vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles and whooping cough, spread quickly.** In the first several months of 2019, there have been a record number of measles cases in 22 states, the second highest number since measles was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000. The 2017 measles outbreak in Minnesota reminds us how a community with low vaccination rates is vulnerable to this serious infection. Of the 79 people infected with measles in 2017, almost all were unvaccinated children under the age of 10, leading to costly medical interventions and a significant investment of public health resources to fight the disease and contain its spread.
- **Immunizations protect the young and medically fragile.** Vaccinations protect not only the individuals who are vaccinated, but also those who are too young or medically fragile to receive vaccines, such as newborns and those with compromised immune systems. High vaccination rates provide herd immunity which protects and strengthens our communities.

Children should not skip or delay vaccines required for school and daycare. Exemptions for non-medical reasons are inappropriate for individual health, public health, and ethical reasons. MNAAP, together with the American Academy of Pediatrics, advocates for their elimination.