

August is good time to check on your child's vaccinations, health officials say

Written by MDH

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CDC report: vast majority of Minnesota children are fully vaccinated when entering kindergarten

Back to school time is fast approaching and state health officials are reminding parents to make sure their children have the benefit of being fully vaccinated against an array of potentially serious childhood diseases. Now is the time to check with your health care provider to make sure your child is up to date on the vaccines he or she needs to start school.

New data released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reaffirms that the vast majority of children in Minnesota enter kindergarten fully vaccinated. In 2012-13, 96.1 percent of all kindergarteners had received all of the immunizations required by Minnesota's school immunization law to protect them against vaccine-preventable diseases. The percent of children who entered kindergarten fully vaccinated has remained steady at about 96 percent since 2005, according to data from the CDC and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

In the 2012-13 school year, 1.6 percent of students entering kindergarten in Minnesota were exempt from all vaccines. "It's a small group compared to those who are vaccinated, but it still leaves the door open for a vaccine-preventable disease to sneak in and make a child very sick or worse," said Kris Ehresmann, director of the Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division at MDH. "We're always striving for 100 percent vaccination coverage."

The remaining 2.3 percent of children were partially vaccinated at the time schools reported compliance with the requirements. Some of these children likely went on to be vaccinated after the date when the data were collected or they obtained a legal exemption to some, but not all vaccines.

The importance of childhood vaccines can be highlighted with the resurgence of pertussis (whooping cough). High vaccination rates with DTaP, the pediatric vaccine that provides pertussis protection, plays an important role in keeping levels of pertussis down in a community. This past year, over 80 cases of pertussis were reported in a small Minnesota community. The outbreak started in a youth mission trip then moved throughout the community and into the schools, affecting mostly adolescents. Even with this significant increase in pertussis disease, the high rates of vaccination in young children prevented spread to the younger age groups.

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"It's very reassuring to see that Minnesota has been able to maintain a high vaccination rate for our kindergarteners," said Karen Ernst, co-founder of the Minnesota Childhood Immunization Coalition. "I think it's important for parents out there to know that vaccinating your child is the norm. Parents who choose not to vaccinate are relying on the rest of us to protect their child and are leaving their child susceptible to disease."

Having a high vaccination rate is vital for the health of the population because it prevents disease from spreading. This is especially important for protecting those who can't be vaccinated because of a medical condition or who don't respond to immunization because of a weak immune system.

For copies of your child's vaccination records, talk to your doctor or call the Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) at 651-201-5503 or 1-800-657-3970.

More information is also available from The CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6230a3.htm?s_cid=mm6230a3_em, and Minnesota Public Health Data Access, <https://apps.health.state.mn.us/mdata/immunization>