

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota's Kindergarten Vaccination Rates Decline *Parents Urged to Schedule Immunizations Now*

BISMARCK, N.D. – According to an annual school immunization assessment, North Dakota's kindergarten immunization rates have declined when compared to last year, and that decline has health officials concerned. The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) urges all parents to make sure their child is up to date on immunizations, and to make appointments now, if necessary, to ensure their child has important immunizations before entering school.

“Low vaccination coverage rates leave North Dakota schools susceptible to outbreaks,” said Lexie Barber. “It is important to maintain high vaccination rates to ensure that schools are a safe and healthy place for children to learn.” Schools self-report immunization rates to the NDDoH. Last year, North Dakota ranked in the bottom ten states for vaccination coverage among kindergarteners for measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP), and chickenpox (varicella).

“For measles, mumps, or rubella (MMR), a vaccination rate of 95% is recommended to maintain herd immunity in schools and prevent cases and outbreaks. Unfortunately, data from the 2015–2016 school assessment indicates the kindergarten MMR vaccine coverage rate is about 87.9% in North Dakota. This means 1,194 kindergartners were not up-to-date when school started,” said Barber. Outbreaks of measles have become more commonplace in the United States due to low vaccination rates and the ease of travel. Last year, 189 cases of measles occurred in the United States. “This year, we have been experiencing a mumps outbreak in North Dakota, and although we have not seen many cases in school age children, the disease could spread in schools if MMR vaccination rates are low.”

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Before entering school in North Dakota, children must have five doses of DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis), four doses of IPV (polio), three doses of HBV (hepatitis B), two doses of MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), and two doses of varicella (chickenpox) vaccine. Vaccines are also required for adolescents entering seventh grade, including immunizations against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap), and meningococcal disease (MCV4).

The NDDoH is working with North Dakota State University's Center for Immunization Research and Education to better understand the attitudes, opinions, practices, and policies surrounding immunizations; school and childcare entry immunization requirements; and exemptions to those requirements in North Dakota. The data gathered will be available this summer and will help guide NDDoH's approach to increasing the vaccination rate.

This week, the NDDoH will be sending letters to parents of children entering kindergarten and seventh grade who still are in need of immunizations. Children can be vaccinated at local public health units or private health care providers. Parents of children who will be attending kindergarten and seventh grade this upcoming fall are encouraged not to wait until the last minute to get their child vaccinated; make an appointment now. For more information on school immunization requirements, contact Lexie Barber, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2335, or visit our website at www.ndhealth.gov/immunize.

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