



ISSUE

Strengthening Minnesota's Vaccine Law

MMA Position

Minnesota's vaccination law is among the weakest in the nation. To protect the health of all Minnesotans, the state should limit exemptions from mandatory school vaccines to medical contraindications only.

Background

Under current Minnesota law, parents and guardians are allowed to exempt their children from mandated vaccinations by citing "conscientious held beliefs" and submitting a signed and notarized form. Despite Minnesota's reputation as a leader in most public health metrics, the state's vaccine law is one of the weakest in the nation.

Immunizations against disease are considered one of the landmark achievements of public health and are responsible for saving tens of millions of lives. Immunization programs have controlled or eliminated the spread of deadly and debilitating epidemic diseases, including smallpox, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, polio and measles. But growing anti-vaccine sentiments and reductions in vaccination rates put these gains at risk, as evidenced by recent outbreaks of pertussis, measles and other diseases.

Childhood vaccinations have proved to be both safe and effective. An analysis of more than 1,000 studies by the Institute of Medicine found the side effects from vaccines are mild and usually short-lasting. And while some parents question vaccine safety, those beliefs are simply not supported by scientific evidence.

Growing rates of parents electing to not vaccinate their children puts the health of their own children, as well as that of others, at risk. Children or adults who cannot be vaccinated, including infants who are too young to be vaccinated; children who have medical contraindications to vaccination; individuals who have weakened immune systems; and the elderly are placed at risk by the intentional actions of those who reject vaccination. The "herd immunity" that comes when the vast majority of a population is immunized protects the most vulnerable among us.

The United States has seen a number of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in recent years, perhaps most notably in a multi-state measles outbreak linked to Disneyland in 2015 in which more than 100 individuals were afflicted. More than 700 Minnesotans had a confirmed, probable, or suspected case of pertussis (whooping cough) in 2015 alone. These outbreaks of preventable diseases underscore that more needs to be done to protect public health.

Talking Points

- **Minnesota has one of the weakest vaccine laws in the United States.** We can and must do more to protect individuals with compromised immune systems, newborns, the elderly and others who cannot receive vaccinations.
- **Vaccines are not only about a single child; they are about protecting all Minnesotans.** By ensuring that all healthy children are vaccinated, that protection is extended to those who are too medically fragile to be vaccinated themselves.
- **Growing rates of unvaccinated children have already led to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases** as evidenced by the 2015 Disneyland measles outbreak and the large number of whooping cough cases here in Minnesota.
- Decades of experience and hundreds of rigorous, peer-reviewed scientific studies have proven conclusively that **vaccines are safe and are a critical tool against the spread of potentially deadly and debilitating diseases.**