

Date: April 9, 2015

TO: The Honorable Arnie Roblan, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Aaron Dunn, MPH
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SUBJECT: SB 895

Chair Roblan and members of the committee, I am Aaron Dunn, Manager of Immunization Program in the Public Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority. I am here to provide information on school and child care immunization requirements.

Vaccinating the population serves a dual purpose: immunizations protect the person themselves, and then have the important added benefit of “community immunity” (which in the past has been referred to as “herd immunity”). If enough people are vaccinated, the levels of infection in the community will be less. The Oregon Immunization Program promotes evidence-based methods for increasing vaccinations.

For the past 35 years, Oregon’s immunization law has helped make sure that children can go to school and child care in a safe and healthy environment without outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. The law requires documentation of immunization or exemption upon enrollment for new enrollment to school, child care, preschool and Head Start programs. Data are collected annually on the number of children up-to-date on immunizations, the number of children with exemptions, and the number of children incomplete on their immunizations and due for the next dose. Rates for schools and child cares are available for release, but individual student information is kept confidential.

All children’s records are reviewed during the school year to identify missing immunizations, including children who are on a catch-up schedule approved by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice, or ACIP. ACIP is a group of medical and public health experts that develop recommendations on use of vaccines to control diseases. The recommended and catch-up schedules are published each year by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Oregon Administrative Rule 333-050-0120 allows for children to be on the ACIP catch-up schedule and be in compliance with school and child care immunization requirements. As long as the ACIP catch-up schedule is followed, an exemption is not needed. Parents choosing to vaccinate their children on a slower or alternative schedule not recommended by ACIP are currently required to have an exemption for those vaccines being delayed; however, the exemption is removed once the child completes the vaccine series and provides documentation of immunization to the school or child care.

Oregon's vaccine exemption rate has been increasing for the past 15 years. The annual rate of vaccine exemptions for Oregon kindergartners has risen steadily from 2.4 percent in 2001-2002 to 7.0 percent in 2013-2014. Some Oregon counties have vaccine exemption rates as high as 16 percent. This means that there are areas of our state where achieving community immunity may be at risk. For example, to achieve community immunity, vaccination rates need to be between 83% and 94% for measles and between 92% and 94% for pertussis.

To address this public health issue, in 2013, the legislature passed a law changing the process for parents to claim a new vaccine exemption to school immunization requirements. This new law was implemented in 2014, and requires parents claiming a new exemption to get education about the benefits and risks of immunization from one of two sources: from speaking with a health care practitioner, or from watching an online vaccine education module.

Preliminary data on the impact that law had on vaccine exemption rates will be available later this month. As we await results for Oregon, we do know that Washington and California realized declines of 20-25% in their vaccine exemption rates after implementation of similar laws. However, while the California and Washington laws required education from a health care practitioner prior to claiming an exemption, those laws did not allow for online education similar to what is available in Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this testimony. I would be pleased to provide the committee with additional information as needed.