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## News: New immunization rules approved by Board of Health

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 15, 2015

DENVER - The Board of Health today passed new immunization rules to strengthen school immunization exemption policy and improve access to immunization information. The rules require parents to obtain non-medical exemptions from school and child care immunization requirements more frequently. Currently, parents who wish to sign a non-medical exemption do so just once, and it is carried through the student's academic career. The new frequency requirement begins in July 2016.

Beginning in July 2016, parents seeking non-medical exemptions for pre-kindergarten children will need to submit exemption forms at each age when recommended vaccines are due. Then from kindergarten through 12th grade, they will need to submit exemption forms annually.

"These new rules are a positive step forward in strengthening our immunization rates and protecting our kids and the communities in Colorado," said Gov. John Hickenlooper. "Yet we know our work is not done and will continue to work with the Board of Health, medical community and our state agencies to ensure parents have the facts about immunizations."

Dr. Larry Wolk, chief medical officer and executive director at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, said, “Reducing vaccine exemptions is just one part of ensuring Colorado’s school children and communities are protected from vaccine-preventable diseases. We will continue working with immunization partners to educate parents on the importance of childhood immunization, and encourage parents to keep their children up to date on vaccinations.”

Research shows that children whose parents claim exemptions are more likely to get and transmit vaccine-preventable diseases. Increased exemption rates lead to greater rates of vaccine-preventable diseases in communities. States with strengthened exemption policies have lower overall exemption rates.

To decrease the burden on schools required to collect exemption data, the department will develop an online form for parents to use.

Also beginning in July 2016, schools and child care centers will be required to annually submit data on immunization and exemption rates to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The department will make the data available to the public. This will allow parents who are concerned about risks of vaccine-preventable diseases to make informed decisions on school and child care choices. It also will provide more timely and accurate data for schools and public health officials in case of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

In addition, the department will make available a voluntary online education module including information on the diseases that vaccines prevent, the benefits and risks of immunization, and evidence-based research, resources and information from credible scientific and public health organizations.

Medical exemptions and exemptions from college and university requirements are unchanged.

Colorado’s current non-medical exemption rate is 4.6 percent. That national average is 1.8 percent.

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