

Testimony to House Health Care Committee - 2/6/14
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TOPIC: Reported Immunization Status of Students in Vermont Schools and Child Care Facilities

Key Objectives:

1. Review the actions taken by the Health Department to ensure full compliance with Act 157 (2012)
2. Summarize key findings from the school and child care annual immunization reports.
3. Identify ongoing efforts to improve Vermont's childhood immunization rates and limit vaccine preventable disease in Vermont.

Actions taken by the Health Department to comply with Act 157 (2012)

- a) Rulemaking, completed Jan 1, 2013
- b) Developed required parental education information for parents seeking a religious or philosophical exemption, and posted the information on the VDH web site.
- c) Provided communication to schools regarding new requirements:
 - o additional reporting for K,1,7 and 8th grades
 - o requirement for parents to read parental educational materials before signing a religious or philosophical exemption
 - o requirement for parents to sign annual religious and philosophical exemption forms
 - o requirement for schools to make aggregate school immunization rates publicly available
- d) Provided aggregate reports to each school in a standardized format
- e) Created a database with the aggregate immunization rates for all schools and placed on Health Department website

Key Findings from school and child care annual immunization reports

School

- a) The percent of students entering Kindergarten who were fully immunized was consistent over the past two years -- 86.9% in 2012-2013 and 87.0% for the previous year.
- b) Overall, the number of students in Kindergarten who were provisionally admitted was 7.0%, the lowest rate in five years.
- c) In public schools 87.4% of the students entering Kindergarten were fully immunized, and over 90% of these students had each of the required immunizations.
- d) In private schools, 78.7% of those entering Kindergarten were fully immunized. The percent of students who were vaccinated by vaccine was below 90% for all vaccines, except hepatitis B which was 91.0%.
- e) Of those students entering Kindergarten who had not yet received a specific vaccine, philosophic exemptions were identified for at least one-third of the students for each vaccine.

- f) For students entering 7th grade, 89.7% of public school students and 77.6% of private school students met immunization requirements.
- g) The percent of students immunized with Tdap increased by 5% in the past three years.

Child Care

Given the exemption for child care noted in Act 157, wide variability in up-to-date immunization status for children less than 5 years of age, limited reporting to date and issues with data quality, the Health Department has not provided aggregate reports of immunization rates for child care facilities. We plan to continue to work with DCF/Child Development Division to identify barriers and continue to improve annual immunization reporting.

Efforts to improve Vermont's childhood immunization rates and limit vaccine preventable disease.

- a) *"It's Ok to Ask"* is a communications campaign targeting vaccine-hesitant parents of young children in Vermont. The centerpiece of this campaign is the website, which provides up-to-date information about immunizations, and answers parent's questions about vaccine safety, the recommended schedule and many other issues. Social media, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, is used to direct traffic to the website where parents can find detailed answers to their questions about the risks and benefits of vaccines.
Website analytics and social media metrics have been tracked since the launch in April 2013, and the data indicates strong audience engagement with campaign. The number of followers on Facebook and Twitter grows weekly, and people are engaging in the conversation about immunizations. Research indicates that a combination of posts about immunizations, general parenting and vaccine preventable diseases is keeping the target audience involved in the conversation.
- b) Health Department public health nurses conducted site visits to over 90% of primary care practices to ensure optimal vaccine management and offer support for immunization efforts.
- c) We collaborated with VCHIP in 2013 on a quality improvement immunization project to increase the percent of children with a complete immunization series and decrease the percent of children missing one or more antigens.
- d) Recall-reminder letters continued to be sent parents of all 8 and 20 month olds who aren't up-to-date according to the Immunization Registry.
- e) District office school liaisons are working with school nurses to provide guidance and support in addressing all state immunization requirements.