


COLORADO SPRINGS NEWS, SPORTS & BUSINESS

Register for 8 FREE stories in a 30 day period. (<http://secure.gazette.com/activate>)

GUEST COLUMN: Access to information helps parents make the best decisions for children

[Google Survey FAQ \(http://gazette.com/google-survey-faq\)](http://gazette.com/google-survey-faq)

By Jake Williams Jessica Goodwin by Jessica Goodwin and Jake Williams Guest columnists - • Published: April 5, 2015 •  2

You may have heard there is room for improvement when it comes to Colorado's vaccination rates, but a new law making this information available on request is an important and welcome development.

House Bill 1288, passed last year, focuses on increasing transparency of immunization rate data of children in schools and child care facilities. Anyone - including parents - can now ask a school or child care facility for these rates. The end result: Parents can be empowered with accurate, up-to-date data to make the best decisions for their families. Newly proposed rules, part of HB 1288's implementation, will make this information even more valuable.

Parents' decisions around vaccinations are unique in that they are not just personal choices. Whether a parent vaccinates their child has real impacts on the rest of the community. Data show school communities with higher vaccine exemption rates are more likely to experience an outbreak of vaccine-preventable disease. For example, the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine coverage among 19- to 35-month-old children was only 86 percent in Colorado in 2013, well below the 92-95 percent levels required to achieve what is known as "herd immunity" - meaning that specific community is protected.

This affects families in real ways. Many parents rely on child care to ensure their young children are in safe, healthy and stimulating environments before they go to school. An outbreak like measles, for example, puts all children - including vaccinated children - at a higher risk of contracting the disease. Transparency around immunization rates is especially critical for the parents of a child who is too young to be vaccinated or who is medically fragile. Simply put, parents have a right to know about this data and be assured that it is accurate.

Under new rules proposed by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, they will. If a child attends a licensed child care facility, nonmedical immunization exemption forms will need to be submitted after each age at which immunizations are recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. These forms also will be submitted during annual enrollment/registration for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Currently, a form must be submitted only once during a child's education.

This change will help schools and child care facilities maintain accurate data and communicate better information to parents and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in case of an outbreak. This frequency also allows parents the opportunity to actively affirm their decision whether or not to vaccinate their children with some regularity, accounting for changes in environments and circumstances. We have experienced a pertussis epidemic in Colorado and are seeing the return of measles across the country, for example. Parents will be able to reconsider choices based on these types of developments.

Immunization rates concern everyone's health - from the youngest to the oldest in our communities and everyone in between. And the fact is that we, as a state, have significant room for improvement. Right now, Colorado has the sixth-

highest rate of immunization exemption nationwide, with 4.3 percent of children exempted from vaccines in the 2012-2013 school year. This equates to nearly 3,000 kindergartners entering school without protection from one or more vaccine-preventable diseases.

Modifying Colorado's rules around vaccination exemption forms helps respect the rights of parents to make medical decisions for their families and the rights of parents to know the risk level of the environments in which they put their children. Increasing transparency and accessibility to the data about school and child care center immunization rates puts parents in the driver's seat. At the end of the day, these proposed rules will help Coloradans make more informed, vital decisions about the health and well-being of their families.

Jessica Goodwin is a registered nurse in Colorado Springs. Jake Williams is executive director of Healthier Colorado, a nonpartisan organization working to ensure Coloradans have the resources needed to make informed, healthy choices.

Trending Articles



Gardner C. Taylor, dean of black preachers, dies at 96 - Religion News Service

(?trend=1)

(<http://gazette.com/gardner-c.-taylor-dean-of-black-preachers-dies-at-96-religion-news-service/article>

/1549206?trend=1)

If you are a subscriber or registered user we welcome your comments. Please **register** (<http://secure.gazette.com/register>) or **login** (<http://secure.gazette.com/login>) with your gazette.com account to comment on a story. Click here for information (</article/1535225>).

i Comment Policy (<http://gazette.com/comments-faq>)