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For Immediate Release

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New Rules for Immunization Waivers

Washtenaw County Public Health offers appointments ahead of “back-to-school” rush

YPSILANTI, Mich., July 23, 2015 – New rules are in place for Michigan parents or guardians opting out of one or more of the required vaccinations for their child or children to attend school or childcare. Under the new rules parents or guardians must participate in a science-based educational session with their local public health department. In Washtenaw County, waiver appointments can be scheduled by calling Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

If a child is not up-to-date on her or his vaccinations, a waiver is required for the child to enroll in:

- a licensed childcare
- preschool or Head Start
- kindergarten
- seventh grade
- a new school district.

Parents or guardians of school-age children entering other grades or remaining in the same school district do not need to request a waiver at this time, even if their child or children are not fully vaccinated.

“There’s been a lot of debate in recent years. We can provide reliable information and local data about the benefits of vaccination and the risks of vaccine-preventable illnesses,” says Jane Nickert, MSN, MSBA, director of nursing for Washtenaw County Public Health. “Local families can then make their own, informed decisions.”

Parents and guardians are encouraged to schedule an appointment at their earliest convenience. Waivers cannot be mailed or completed over the phone. Appointments take approximately 30 minutes.

Washtenaw County Public Health has issued over 220 waivers as of the end of June. Up to 900 more educational sessions may need to be scheduled prior to the start of school in September.

“This is an opportunity for us to speak directly with families and answer any questions they may have,” says Nickert. “But, to accommodate everyone, we encourage families to schedule their appointments with us sooner rather than later.”

Why the Change?

Michigan has one of the highest waiver rates in the country. Washtenaw County has a higher waiver rate (8%) than other Michigan counties (6% overall).

When are Waivers Required?

Michigan Public Health Law requires that all infants and children have certain vaccinations or a valid waiver before entering public or private school or licensed childcare settings. These requirements exist to prevent the spread of disease and to prevent injury or death in the community. Immunization records are checked every fall for all licensed childcare, preschool and Head Start students. Public and private schools check immunization records at the beginning of the school year for kindergartners, seventh graders and all newly enrolled students.

The new rules apply to nonmedical waivers, or those requested based on religious, philosophical or other objections to receiving required vaccines. Waivers are only reviewed at the grade levels and conditions specified above. The new rules do not change the existing process for children who have a medical reason for not receiving a vaccine (a medical contraindication or precaution).

Washtenaw County Public Health

Washtenaw County Public Health promotes health and works to prevent disease or injury in our community. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs. Visit us online at <http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org> or call us at 734-544-6700.

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services implemented the rule change on January 1 of this year. See “Immunization Waiver Information” at: http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,4612,7-132-2942_4911_4914_68361-344843--,00.html for more about the change.

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