



# Vermont Immunization Action Network

## VIAN Quarterly Newsletter

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### VIAN Partners

American Academy of Pediatrics,  
Vermont Chapter

Bi-State Primary Care Association

Boys & Girls Clubs of Burlington

Building Bright Futures

Copley Health Systems

Fletcher Allen Health Care

Gifford Medical Center

LeadingAge Vermont

March of Dimes, Vermont Chapter

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student

Springfield Medical Care Systems

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Vermont Assembly of Home Health  
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Vermont Association of Adult Day  
Services

Vermont Association of Hospitals  
and Health Systems

Vermont CARES

Vermont Federation of Nurses and  
Health Professionals

Vermont Medical Society

Vermont Nurse Practitioners Asso-  
ciation

Vermont Public Health Association

Voices for Vermont's Children

### Measles Outbreak at Disneyland

The greatest concern for a family visiting Disneyland is usually how long the lines will be for their favorite rides! Now, with the recent measles outbreak, families are concerned about whether they will contract this serious, and sometimes deadly, disease.

At least 70 cases of measles have been confirmed to have originated from one person who visited Disneyland during the holidays last month. Most of the confirmed cases involved unvaccinated people, including those who were too young to vaccinate.

Health officials are growing more concerned about the escalating spread of preventable diseases. Before the December cases, 2014 was already the worst year of measles cases in California in nearly two decades. Another disease, whooping cough, was recorded as having the highest rate in California in 2014 since 1958.

One in four of the California measles cases required hospitalization. Initially, health officials believed the measles spread at Disneyland only during a four-day period in December, but it is now believed that both employees and visitors infected with measles remained at the park into January.

Up until this year, a smaller percentage of California's kindergartners were getting a full set of immunizations by the time they entered school. However, as reported by the Los Angeles Times earlier this month, the percentage of California parents who opted out of vaccinating their children last year, because of personal beliefs, dropped for the first time in 12 years. Under a recent state law, parents are now required to obtain documentation proving that health care practitioners have informed them about vaccines and diseases before they can opt out of vaccinating their children.

According to a Los Angeles Times analysis, the rate of vaccine waivers filed for kindergartners in California dropped from 3.1% in 2013 to 2.5% in 2014.. Declines were larger in districts with high exemption rates. The rate decline is being attributed to the new legal requirements.

State and park officials say that Disneyland is safe for inoculated visitors but those with unvaccinated children should be aware of the risks.

**For more information about VIAN, like us on Facebook!**

The Vermont Immunization Action Network (VIAN) is an information-sharing network of organizations and individuals who promote family, community, and health care professional awareness of, and responsibility for, appropriate immunization of all children and adults against vaccine-preventable diseases.

## Michigan Makes it Tougher to Obtain Vaccine Waivers

Beginning this year, Michigan parents will have to get a certificate from their local health department if they want to opt out of vaccinating their children. The certificate will state they were told about the risks of not vaccinating, both for their kids and the greater community. Michigan has one of the highest vaccine waiver rates in the nation. The goal is to make it harder for parents to be exempt from immunizing their children against contagious diseases by requiring parents to take extra steps in order to get permission to leave their children unprotected. Parents first have to provide a written statement indicating the religious or philosophical objections to the vaccinations. They then must hear from a health worker about vaccines and the diseases they're intended to prevent. They will also have to sign a form acknowledging they may be putting their own child and other people's children at risk with the failure to vaccinate. When it comes to vaccinating your children, Dr. David Davenport, an infectious disease specialist at Borgess Hospital, says that it is a no-brainer and that "vaccines have and always will be the best bang for your buck in medicine".

## Other States Are Concerned about the High Risk Posed by Exemptions

Maine is among 18 states that allow parents to use the philosophical exemption for required school immunizations. Although children are also exempt from the requirements for medical and religious reasons, these exemptions are a small fraction of Maine's opt-outs. Mississippi and West Virginia are the only states that don't allow exemptions for religious or philosophical reasons. Mississippi had the highest kindergarten vaccination rate in the country in 2012-13, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A growing concern in the country is the recent outbreaks of measles. Despite the virtual elimination of measles in the U.S., we are seeing a record number of measles cases as a growing number of parents opt out of vaccinations for their children. As of the end of November, 610 cases have been reported across 24 states. Some states with high opt-out rates, including California, have seen outbreaks of the measles. Measles cases in Michigan encouraged that state's vaccination rule change.

Other states have begun taking action to try to curb their rising exemption rates. Washington State recently passed a law requiring parents to speak to a doctor about the benefits and risks of vaccinations before they can be exempt. New Jersey lawmakers are also considering changes to that state's opt-out requirements. A bill was proposed in Maine early last year (later rejected by the Appropriations Committee) by a representative who is also a pediatric nurse practitioner. The bill sought to have schools provide information to parents on the benefits and risks of vaccinations. Despite some challenges, and setbacks, many lawmakers across the country are starting to realize that stronger immunization laws are the best way to minimize the real threat of preventable childhood illnesses to the health of children across the country.

## Correlation between Lenient Exemption Laws and Outbreaks of Preventable Disease

A recent Opinion in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) notes a correlation between the stringency of laws governing non-medical vaccine exemptions and the occurrences of outbreaks of preventable disease in the United States. These outbreaks have been associated with increasing numbers of families actively declining immunizations against preventable diseases for their children. The Opinion suggests that legislatures consider implementing more rigorous policies, such as requiring annual exemption requests, completing education requirements, and extending vaccination requirements to private as well as public schools

One approach, recently adopted by California, Oregon, and Washington, is to require parents seeking exemption to engage in an "informed refusal" process, which compels an exemption-seeking parent to engage in a mandatory conversation about the benefits and risks of immunization with a health care practitioner or to take an online course on vaccine benefits and risks. Affording parents the opportunity to have a more in-depth discussion with a trusted health care practitioner is thought to increase the likelihood that some vaccine-questioning parents ultimately will choose to vaccinate their child. Ever since California enacted its law last year making it harder to opt out, the number of those doing so has significantly decreased.

Despite Vermont's recent statutory amendments, which require annual filings for exemption requests and acknowledgement of completion of an educational requirement, the amendments did not go as far as CA, OR, and WA. Vermont still has the second highest rate of opts out in the country.

## Resources

Vermont Department of Health - It's OK to Ask - <http://oktoaskvt.org/>

American Academy of Pediatrics - <http://www2.aap.org/immunization/families/families.html>

World Health Org - [http://www.who.int/vaccine\\_safety/initiative/communication/network/vaccine\\_safety\\_websites/en/](http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/initiative/communication/network/vaccine_safety_websites/en/)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - <http://www.cdc.gov/VACCINES/vac-gen/default.htm>