

Advisory Committee on Medical Exemptions
Virtual Meeting May 12, 2022

Attendees:

Jody Terranova, D.O.; Chair, Pediatrician UConn School of Medicine
Kathy Kudish, DVM; Department of Public Health Immunization Program Manager
Ricky Baltimore; Chief Legal Counsel State Democrats
Susan Amster, P.A.; Physician Assistant Willows Pediatrics
Keisha Hewitt; Nurse Consultant State of Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
Chlo-Anne Bobrowski; State of Connecticut Department of Education Division of School Health
Lori Flaherty; Supervisor of Non-Public School Nurses West Hartford
Inci Yildirim M.D.; Yale School of Medicine
Henry Salton; Department of Public Health Legal Counsel

Meeting was called to order at 10:05 AM by Dr. Terranova and introductions were made.
Dr. Terranova reviewed the charge of the committee.

Henry Salton from DPH led a discussion on what information the department can legally collect concerning medical contraindications: DPH can collect information on contraindications from providers for each vaccine (MMR, Varicella etc.) but not from schools. New legislation that goes into effect as of July 1, 2022 can require providers to report contraindications to vaccinations in a manner to be determined by the Department of Public Health. This requirement, however, would not be retroactive.

Dr. Yildirim wanted to confirm that the committee would not have access to school records and Henry replied that the committee does not have the authority to access school records. Dr. Yildirim asked if the committee would have aggregate school data and if there is a deadline to complete the school survey and Kathy responded that yes we do have summary data and she will be presenting that information to the group. The survey deadline is usually around the last week of November and asks for the vaccination status of students as of October 1st of each year.

Kathy then reviewed school immunization data for the 2020-21 school year and the requirements for grades Pre-K through 12. The survey collects information on required vaccines only and does not include Covid vaccine which is not required for school entry. Kathy continued with a reminder of how many doses of each vaccine are required for school entry as well a review of Public Act 21-6 which repealed religious exemptions in Connecticut but did allow children in grades K through 12 who had an existing Religious Exemption on file as of April 27, 2021 to be grandfathered in with their current exemption. Kathy noted that the 2020-21 school year was in the midst of the Covid pandemic and data was collected in the fall when many schools were either fully or partially remote. Record collection was likely more difficult during this time and any students missing immunizations were counted as non-compliant.

Data for the 2020-21 school year decreased slightly from the previous year. The percentage of Kindergarten students out of compliance for MMR was 2.1 %, an increase of 0.8 % from the 2019-20 school year. We will have to watch this data closely to see if the decrease was due to the pandemic or part of a downward trend. Religious exemptions stayed at 2.3 % for the second consecutive year, slightly above the national rate of 2.2 %.

Susan Amster asked if private schools require the same vaccines as public schools and Kathy responded that the requirements are the same and that hopefully enforcement of those requirements is occurring

the same in the private sector as well. As a reminder the school immunization survey rates for Kindergarten and 7th grade are posted on the DPH website as well as Religious and Medical Exemption rates.

Chlo-Anne Bobrowski from the state Department of Education provided the committee with an update on school nursing to student ratio levels. The nurse to student ration in Elementary schools is as follows:

1 Nurse to 250 students: 18.5 %

1 Nurse to 251-500 students: 68.5 %

1 Nurse to 551-750 students: 12.5 %

1 Nurse to >750 students: 0.0 % (2020-21 Health Services Program Information Survey Report)

The nurse to student ration in secondary schools is as follows:

1 Nurse to 250 students: 7.6 %

1 Nurse to 251-500 students: 39 %

1 Nurse to 551-750 students: 38.1 %

1 Nurse to >750 students: 15.3 %

Chlo also mentioned that due to the effects of the pandemic that many districts gave students until October 1st (and not the first day of school) to receive their vaccinations for the 2021 school year. Dr. Terranova asked how schools are enforcing immunization requirements: what are the policies statewide? Chlo answered that policies are enforced for the most part uniformly although there may be some districts were a little more flexible and gave the student a little wiggle room to get their immunization paperwork in and get into compliance due to difficulty for some families to schedule a doctor appointment during the summer months of the ongoing pandemic. Lori Flaherty added that some schools are stricter than others and will keep non-compliant students out, while other schools don't. A lot depends on the school administration (principal). Lori added that she is seeing a lot of alternative schedules being submitted and many times the school nurse is left to sort out whether to accept these requests. She feels there needs to be more support and guidance from DPH and the state Department of Education for the school nurses.

Dr. Terranova put forth 2 recommendations from the committee:

1. A joint workgroup of SDE and DPH to be convened to address the issues raised by Lori Flaherty and provide guidelines for school nurses regarding policies for under vaccinated/unvaccinated students and appropriate catch up schedules. Ideally this would be in place for the start of the 2022-23 school year.
2. Based on legal information provided by Henry Salton, recommend that DPH pursue updates to regulations that would require providers to file a copy of the medical exemption form with DPH. DPH would need to identify the best method for collecting this data.

Susan Amster asked if school nurses have access to the state registry CT WiZ for looking up student records. Lori responded that yes school nurses do have access and are increasingly using the registry to update a student's record before contacting their primary care provider for any updated information.

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 AM

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 3, 2022.

Minutes submitted by Mick Bolduc Connecticut Immunization Program