

OTHER VIEWS

Know risks before getting vaccine waiver

Michigan used to have one of the highest rates of child vaccine waivers in the country. Since new state health department guidelines took effect two years ago, those numbers have dropped significantly. That's a victory for children's health, and it doesn't hamper parental rights. The rules should stay in place.

Yet some Republican lawmakers have proposed bills that would reverse the requirement for parents who do not want to vaccinate their children. Under the current health directive,

parents of school-aged children must first speak to medical professionals if they wish to get a waiver. Those conversations have informed and changed parents' opinions, many of whom admit to health professionals they simply didn't understand the value of vaccines.

The lawmakers fear Michigan Department of Health and Human Services officials are interfering with their turf and the vaccine guidelines conflict with existing state law. As the law stands, unless parents signs an

immunization waiver, they must prove their children have been vaccinated before beginning school or daycare.

Parents who are philosophically opposed to vaccines can still get a waiver, however, as state law allows this for personal or medical reasons. Health officials simply want to make sure parents understand the risks for their child — and others — if they opt out.

"No one changes their mind immediately," says Shane Bies, administrator of public health

nursing services for Oakland County. "These are conversations. If they have 10 reasons not to vaccinate and they leave with one reason, the result doesn't change for that day. But eventually, conversations with their health care provider may nudge them to get their children vaccinated."

Bills introduced earlier this year, sponsored by Rep. Tom Barrett, R-Pottersville and Sen. Patrick Colbeck, R-Canton, would serve to keep Michigan residents ignorant about the realities of vaccination by rolling back the health department's waiver rule. Lawmakers also are concerned about the department having the ability to block some children from attending school if an out-

break were to occur.

Both bill sponsors claim the requirement hinders individual free choice and inconveniences Michigan parents unnecessarily.

Nevertheless, the education that parents have received in the meetings has changed their minds. Since the requirement has been in place, there has been a 35 percent drop in waivers, according to state health officials.

Ignorance is not freedom. Lawmakers should support the efforts of health officials to educate parents about vaccination and allow them to make an informed choice.

— *The Detroit News via AP Marketplace (Dec. 27)*