



For Immediate Release

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**AS SCHOOL RESUMES ACROSS CONNECTICUT, DEPARTMENT
OF PUBLIC HEALTH REMINDS PARENTS TO MAKE SURE
CHILD VACCINATIONS ARE UP TO DATE**

**KINDERGARTEN IMMUNIZATION RATE FOR MEASLES, MUMPS AND RUBELLA (MMR)
DECLINED IN 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR; RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION RATE INCREASED**

Hartford – As schools across Connecticut resume class this week, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) today is reminding parents to make sure their child’s immunizations are up to date. The DPH is also reporting that while the MMR immunization rate for Connecticut’s kindergarten students remains high, that rate declined from 96.5% for the 2017-2018 school year to a figure of 95.9% for the 2018-2019 school year that concluded this past June, according to data reported to DPH as of August 13, 2019, a decrease of 0.6%.

In addition, the DPH is reporting that the overall number of religious exemptions to vaccination increased by 25% between the two school years (from 2.0% to 2.5%). This represents the largest single year increase in religious exemptions for vaccination since the DPH started tracking the statewide data a decade ago. This also continues a trend of steadily declining MMR vaccination rates among Connecticut kindergarteners since the 2015-2016 school year.

“As our children go back to school this week, it is important to have on the parental checklist that all vaccinations are up-to-date,” said DPH Commissioner Renée D. Coleman-Mitchell. “Connecticut overall is meeting the guideline recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that at least 95% of kindergarteners receive the MMR vaccine required for school attendance. It does raise concern, however, that this number declined in the 2018-2019 school year while religious exemptions for vaccine-preventable diseases overall have increased. If parents have any questions about vaccinating their children, they should discuss them with their child’s primary care physician. We want to make sure every school in Connecticut has a high enough percentage of immunized children to prevent a vaccine-preventable disease such as measles from spreading in a school environment.”

High vaccination rates protect not only vaccinated children but also those who cannot or have not been vaccinated. This is called herd immunity. Schools that achieve herd immunity reduce the risk of outbreaks. High vaccination rates at schools are especially important for medically fragile children. Some children have conditions that affect their immunity, such as illnesses that require chemotherapy. These children cannot be safely vaccinated, and, at the same time, they are less able to fight off illness when they are infected. They depend on herd immunity for their health and their lives.

In the decade before 1963 when a vaccine became available, nearly all children got measles by the time they were 15 years of age. It is estimated 3 to 4 million people in the United States were infected each year. Also each year, among reported cases, an estimated 400 to 500 people died, 48,000 were hospitalized, and 1,000 suffered encephalitis (swelling of the brain) from measles.

In 2019, the United States has seen the largest increase in the number of measles cases in the last 25 years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 1,215 people in 30 states had contracted measles between January 1 and August 22, 2019, including three cases in Connecticut and more than 1,000 in Brooklyn and Rockland County, NY: <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html>.

“The resurgence of measles in the United States is of great public health concern,” said Commissioner Coleman-Mitchell. “When we released immunization rates by school this past May, my goal was twofold: to better inform parents of the vaccination rates in their children’s schools so they might protect their children; and to encourage higher rates of immunization overall. I know that this is especially important to parents whose children cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons.”

“The decline in vaccination rates and the increase in the number of religious exemptions validates the need to release immunization rates by county and by school for the 2018-2019 school year by October 21, 2019.”, Coleman-Mitchell said.

Anyone with questions regarding the Connecticut Vaccine Program can call 860-509-7929 or send an email to dph.immunizations@ct.gov.

For more information about vaccine-preventable diseases, please visit: <https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Immunizations/VACCINE-PREVENTABLE-DISEASES>.