

August 5, 2011

CATEGORY: News Release
RELEASE DATE: For Immediate Release
RE: New Immunization Law in Washington State
CONTACT: E. W. Gray, M.D., Health Officer
Northeast Tri County Health District

Washington has one of the highest school immunization exemption rates in the nation. Washington's exemption rates have more than doubled over the last ten (10) years. Previous State policy made it easy for parents to exempt their child from school immunization requirements for convenience reasons. Within Washington, the tri-county area ranks amongst the highest exemption rates in the State, with some school districts having over 1/3 of their students exempt from immunization. This leaves our communities very vulnerable to a vaccine preventable disease outbreak.

Immunizations save lives. Diseases can spread quickly in schools and child care centers, and we've had outbreaks of whooping cough, measles, and other diseases in our state recently. Unimmunized children are more likely to get and spread disease that vaccines can prevent.

On May 10, 2011, Governor Gregoire signed a bill that requires a licensed health care provider to sign a Certificate of Exemption for a parent or guardian to exempt their child from school and child care immunization requirements. The signature verifies that the provider gave the parent or guardian information about the benefits and risks of immunization. A parent or guardian can also turn in a signed letter from a health care provider stating the same information. The law went into effect on July 22, 2011. It only applies to exemptions requested after this date. Health officials hope the law will reduce the number of "convenience" exemptions (parents who turn in the exemption form, even when their child is vaccinated).

The new law allows one exception to getting a health care provider signature. This exception is for the small number of parents or guardians who claim a religious exemption and also demonstrate membership in a religious body that does not allow a health care provider to provide medical treatment to a child.

- Stevens County** - 240 E. Dominion, Colville, WA 99114
 - Administration:** 509-684-1301, Fax: 509-684-1002
 - Clinic:** 509-684-5048, Fax: 509-684-9878
 - Family Planning:** 509-684-6209, Fax: 509-684-9878

- Stevens County** - 260 S. Oak, Colville, WA 99114
 - Environmental Health:** 509-684-2262, Fax: 509-684-8506

- Ferry County** - 147 N. Clark, PO Box 584, Republic, WA 99166
509-775-3111, Fax: 509-775-2853

- Pend Oreille County** - 605 Highway 20, Newport, WA 99156
509-447-3131, Fax: 509-447-5644

- Website:** www.netchd.org

Northeast Tri County Health anticipates that this new law may cause delays in new student registrations, and the necessity for unimmunized or partially immunized students to make an appointment with their health care provider in order to comply with the new law. Some health care providers may not have the ability to accommodate increased demand for appointments and immunizations prior to the start of school. For this reason, Northeast Tri County Health District recommends planning early to avoid delays in getting your child into school.

All recommended vaccines for kids under age nineteen (19) are provided at no cost through the State Childhood Vaccine Program. Health care providers can charge an office visit or administration fee, but this fee may be waived for those who are unable to pay. Parents are urged to go to their regular health care provider for childhood immunizations and questions about vaccines.

Northeast Tri County Health District also provides vaccines on an appointment basis to children needing to update their vaccinations. However, Northeast Tri County Health District staff do not have the proper credentials to sign the Certificate of Exemption forms, and thus cannot sign the Certificate of Exemption forms for students. Parents or guardians must have the forms completed by their licensed health care provider.

School nurses have access to Washington's Child Profile Immunization Registry to help parents turn in complete and accurate immunization records.

For more information on the new law, visit www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/schools/default.htm

If you have any questions, please contact the Health District at the numbers below:

Health District Offices:	Colville Community Health	(509) 684-5048
	Colville Environmental Health	(509) 684-2262
	Newport Community/Environmental Health	(509) 447-3131
	Republic Community/Environmental Health	(509) 775-3111

###