

NEWS RELEASE

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IDPH Acts to Increase Vaccination Rates in Illinois

Department Announces Steps to Increase Accessibility of Vaccines and Expand Outreach and Education Efforts

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is taking steps to increase vaccination rates across the state, in response to Illinois’ seven measles cases and CDC reports of more than 600 cases across the country in 2019, 71 reported last week alone. These steps include increasing accessibility to vaccines, expanding outreach in communities with low vaccination rates, and educating the public on the importance of vaccines.

“We are taking the threat posed by a rise in measles cases very seriously and are committed to taking action to keep Illinoisans safe,” **said Governor Pritzker**. “Working across agencies and at all levels of government, we will be taking steps to increase vaccination rates and ensure all of our families are educated about the resources available to them. There is no more important responsibility of our state government than keeping Illinoisans healthy and safe, and addressing this threat is a top priority for my administration as we move forward.”

“IDPH is committed to taking action to keep our communities safe from measles and other preventable diseases,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike**. “Vaccination is our best tool to protect our families and while overall vaccination rates for the state are strong, some specific communities have lower rates and remain vulnerable to disease outbreaks. Through a multifaceted approach that will include breaking down barriers to vaccination, targeted outreach, and education, IDPH is committed to increasing vaccination rates in every corner of Illinois and minimizing the threat of measles in our state.”

Public health officials are working with schools, community organizations, religious groups, parent organizations, and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to provide vaccinations. Steps will include, but are not limited to:

- **Mobile Units:** IDPH will assist in providing mobile health units to neighborhoods with low vaccination rates to hold clinics and provide vaccinations.
- **Targeted Events:** IDPH will identify events with high parent and children attendance and support vaccination clinics at these events. These can include county fairs and neighborhood celebrations.

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- Faith Outreach: IDPH will work with religious organizations to sponsor vaccination clinics after services, during vacation bible school, and near other religious gatherings.
- Community Coordination: IDPH will work with community health workers and parent educators to help set up appointment times for vaccinations, provide or arrange transportation, and assist parents in filling out the paperwork.
- Public Education: IDPH will work to combat misinformation about vaccines and increase education efforts through health events, marketing, and social media.

IDPH is also working with the Illinois State Board of Education to conduct a more in-depth data analysis that will inform additional actions. This qualitative and quantitative study will focus on schools at risk for outbreaks due to student vaccination rates of less than 95%. The study aims to understand why the school is experiencing a lower vaccination rate and identify who, specifically, is not being vaccinated. IDPH is currently working with local health departments across the state to meet and talk with school officials and health care providers in the community to learn about barriers that limit vaccination and identify additional opportunities to increase rates. Barriers already identified include:

- Transportation: Some parents do not have a way to get their children to clinics for vaccinations.
- Time: Health clinic hours may not fit with working parents' schedule.
- Paperwork: Vaccination requires the consent forms to be filled by the parent. Some parents may be overwhelmed by the paperwork and not fully understand how to fill it out.
- Wait Times: While local health departments and providers may offer special vaccination clinics before the beginning of the school year, the wait times can sometimes be more than an hour.

IDPH continues to recruit and retain Vaccine for Children (VFC) health care providers. The federally funded VFC program provides vaccines at no cost to children who might otherwise not be vaccinated. IDPH is currently working across agencies and with the governor's office to identify ways to help reduce the burden of the program on providers, and to help them be compliant.

Communities with low vaccination rates are at risk for disease outbreaks. If one person in a community is infected, the disease can spread to others who are not vaccinated. In communities where the overwhelming majority of people are vaccinated, there are fewer opportunities for the disease to spread, often called "herd immunity."

Education and awareness are critical to increasing vaccination rates. There is extensive misinformation circulating about the safety of vaccines. It is important for the public to understand that we have the safest vaccine supply in U.S. history and that vaccines offer the best protection against illness from vaccine-preventable diseases. IDPH is working to increase knowledge about vaccines through social media, its website, informational brochures, health events around the state, and more.

Vaccination protects you from illness, and also protects the community around you, especially those who are unable to be vaccinated, such as babies and people with weakened immune systems. Vaccination is a shared responsibility that we must uphold or risk turning back the clock to a time when measles was widespread, and thousands died each year.