



**County
Health Officials
of New York**
Leading the way to healthier communities

SUPPORTS

A.2371/S.2994 (Dinowitz/Hoylman)

AN ACT to repeal subdivision 9 of section 2164 of the public health law, relating to exemption from vaccination due to religious beliefs

The New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) supports repealing all non-medical exemptions from vaccination requirements for children.

New York State laws require children to receive certain immunization in order to be allowed to attend public, private or parochial schools. Section 2164 of the public health law currently allows for medical and religious exemptions. These non-medical exemptions result in lower overall vaccination rates, which pose a threat to the health both children and adults who are medically unable to be vaccinated. Declines in vaccination rates are allowing for the reestablishment of diseases that had once been largely eradicated in the United State, such as mumps and measles.

In 2000, due to the public health success of strong immunization requirements and adherence, the United States declared the elimination of measles transmission. Since that time, due to global trends in vaccine refusals, there have been new outbreaks in the U.S., with disease imported by infected travelers. In 2015, the “Disneyland outbreak” led to over 150 cases in seven states. Investigators believe the 2015 outbreak began by a single theme park visitor infecting 39 others. As a result, California eliminated “personal belief” exemptions.

Currently, Rockland County, NY and New York City are combatting significant measles outbreaks. These outbreaks, which started in the fall of 2018, have resulted in illness and hospitalizations, as well as lost days of school and work, and, in some cases, the imposition of social distancing orders, due to the need to halt transmission of disease among unvaccinated individuals. The outbreaks occurred in communities with higher rates of non-medical exemptions. A 2013 outbreak in the Bronx in a community with high rates of non-medical exemptions cost the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene close to \$400,000, with health department staff spending over 10,000 hours in working to stop the spread of the disease. Health care providers and individuals also incurred additional costs due to treatment and lost workdays.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends an immunization rate of 95% in order to maintain herd immunity, but according to 2017-2018 State data, 467 public and private schools in New York had immunization rates below 85%. This included 323 schools below 70%. Rates were much lower in private schools, with 88% of these schools reporting immunization rates of 85% or less, including 311 private schools with rates of less than 70%.

Vaccination rates are lower across Europe than in the United States, and Europe had four times more measles cases in 2017 compared to 2016. The likelihood of an infected person traveling to the United States, specifically to New York City is high, as was the case in both the New York City and Rockland County outbreaks. Maintaining high vaccination rates and thus, herd immunity protects the public from life-threatening diseases such as measles.

Non-medical exemption from vaccination requirements weakens protections against vaccine-preventable diseases. The recent outbreaks show how quickly diseases such as measles can spread in unvaccinated populations, and the challenges in implementing the measures needed to halt their spread once exposure occurs.

This legislation is critical to protect the public health from the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases. NYSACHO strongly supports this legislation and recommends it to be enacted into law immediately.

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