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Immunization Conversation

By Cathy Dausman



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maintains both a website and Facebook page.

Another, Our Kids Our Choice, said in a press release that the organization was "disappointed and surprised" with the governor's decision to sign the bill into law. "With the stroke of a pen, he has dismissed over 200,000 Californian school children who depend upon personal belief exemptions in order to receive a free and appropriate education."

OKOC lists itself as a "non-partisan, grassroots group of 9,600 politically active health choice advocates" whose members believe "it is in society's best interest to maintain freedom of choice for what we put into our children's bodies."

Nurse practitioner Aimee Paulson of Walnut Creek supports mandatory school vaccinations. Paulson writes she has spent "increasingly more time educating patients about the risks and benefits of vaccination" and is "very satisfied" that SB 277 passed. She added that she has not seen an active measles case recently, but did confirm one Hib (type B influenza) case.

"We are fortunate to have the ability to protect our families and communities against the pre-vaccine devastation of polio, measles, influenza, hepatitis and many other illnesses," Paulson said, provided "we continue pro-vaccine efforts."

Sarah Ellison calls the immunization question "an important public health issue," and one that pits a parents' right to decide against the risk an unvaccinated child would pose "to the more [medically] vulnerable population."

The Lafayette mother of two children, ages 1 and 4, feels having the ability to immunize children against childhood diseases is "one of the greatest advances in medicine," whose effectiveness also depends upon herd immunity - immunize a high enough percentage of the population and even those unvaccinated will receive some measure of protection against the disease.

"We're cautious," Ellison said, recalling how she and her husband asked family members to get whooping cough booster shots after her youngest was born. That same child did experience a reaction in the form of a skin rash after a measles shot; something she said was "pretty bad for two weeks."

Still, Ellison insists on keeping her children fully immunized, saying in spite of the side effects it is worth the risk.

Connie Kellaher is director at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church Nurtury Preschool. Because

Gov. Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 277 June 30, yet immunization conversations continue. The bill, which largely eliminates the personal belief exemptions for school-required immunizations, takes effect Jan. 1, 2016. SB 277 sets as its goal the statewide "total immunization of appropriate age groups" against 10 childhood diseases plus "any other disease deemed appropriate," as recommended by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

While many fervently support the mandatory school immunization program, its detractors are equally as determined to see this new law end before it starts. Google SB 277 and a list of organizations against mandatory immunizations pops up: California Coalition for Vaccine Choice

they are a state-licensed preschool Kellahe said MVPC will be in full compliance with SB 277 when it takes effect. Although Kellahe has not yet reviewed all incoming student documents, she is not aware that any student currently claims a personal belief exemption.

And there is a bit of wiggle room within the PBE clause.

Nanette Farag, chief of staff for Assemblywoman Catharine Baker, said: "If a child has an exemption on file before the bill takes effect in January they do not have to get immunized until they reach the next grade span." A grade span is a specific class range - birth to preschool; kindergarten to sixth grade; seventh to 12th grade. "Children who have never been enrolled in school prior to January 1, or children who will transition to a new grade span after January 1, will be required to provide proof of immunization or submit a medical exemption in order to enroll in school," she added.

Baker, herself a parent of two young school age children, calls herself "a fierce supporter of parental rights, including the rights of parents who have children who cannot be vaccinated."

"This bill strikes the right balance between a parent's personal choice and personal responsibility," she said.

Baker said she supported amendments that included narrowing the list of required vaccinations to 10, expanded the bases of medical exemptions, and gave schooling options to parents who did not want to vaccinate their children. "We have to consider the decision of parents who choose not to vaccinate, and also the liberty of those who cannot vaccinate their children or themselves due to their health circumstances," she said.

More Information Online

Information about Senate Bill 277:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB277

CDC Immunization schedules:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/child-adolescent.html>

How the legislators voted:

http://leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/sen/sb_0251-0300/sb_277_vote_20150625_1048AM_asm_floor.html

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[back](#)

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