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To: Principals of Public Schools
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From: Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D, Commissioner
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Pejman Talebian, MA, MPH, Director
Immunization Program, Department of Public Health

Re: 2016-2017 Kindergarten Immunization Survey

Date: August 2016

The annual public and private school Kindergarten Immunization Survey is being conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). The purpose of this survey is to identify children entering kindergarten who are not protected against vaccine-preventable diseases and to ensure that they are properly immunized according to state requirements. This survey is conducted under authority of the School Immunization Law, M.G.L. c. 76, § 15.

School Immunization Requirements for the 2016-2017 School Year

The regulations require the following immunizations for students entering kindergarten through fifth grade:

- 5 doses DTaP vaccine
- 4 doses polio vaccine
- 2 doses MMR vaccine
- 3 doses hepatitis B vaccine
- 2 doses varicella vaccine

Please note that the regulations regarding 2 doses of MMR and 2 doses of varicella apply to kindergarten through fifth grade this year; however we are only collecting data on students in kindergarten.

Children who are not in compliance must be excluded from school until the school receives proper documentation of immunization or a valid medical or religious exemption. To avoid student exclusion, every effort must be made to inform parents and physicians of this requirement. Please see the MDPH document, *Recommended Immunization Schedule 2016*, for additional details.

Please note that unimmunized or partially immunized homeless children cannot be denied entry to public schools if they do not have their immunization records. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act states that if a homeless child or youth arrives lacking immunizations or medical records, refer the parent/guardian to the district's Homeless Education Liaison, who has the responsibility to obtain relevant academic records, immunizations or medical records and to ensure that homeless students are attending school while the records are obtained. The student must be enrolled and permitted to attend public school in the interim. If you have any questions about the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, please contact Sarah Slautterback, State Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, at (781) 338-6330.

This year we are again asking you to report on the number of students with medical and religious exemptions to each vaccine on the survey. This helps us determine patterns in exemptions which could potentially lead to disease outbreaks and to develop appropriate education materials. We continue to ask you to report on the total number of students with any exemptions in addition to exemptions to each individual vaccine. We will also be asking about the number of students with an exemption that have no documented vaccines (are unimmunized).

Use of the Massachusetts Immunization Information System (MIIS)

Beginning this year, school nurses will be able to use the MIIS to compile student records and complete the school survey. Use of the MIIS to submit the school survey will become mandatory in the coming years. School administrators are encouraged to register their schools/districts to obtain access to the MIIS as soon as possible. Further information regarding the MIIS can be found at www.contactmiis.info.

Access to Medical Records

Since the implementation of the HIPAA Privacy Rule in April 2003, the MDPH Immunization Program has received numerous questions and requests for clarification from school personnel in regards to obtaining individual student immunization records from physician offices. The MDPH Privacy Officer and the Office of the General Counsel have reviewed these requests and concluded that physicians and other licensed providers are permitted under HIPAA, without an individual authorization, to disclose information and records related to a patient's immunization status to a school and its agents, including school nurses, to meet the requirements of M.G.L. c. 76, § 15, 105 CMR 220.000, and 603 CMR 18.05(9)(g)6.

An amendment to Reportable Diseases, Surveillance and Isolation, and Quarantine Requirements (105 CMR 300.190 and 191) clarifies nurses' authority to obtain immunization records or immunization related information required for school admission from health care providers, without the specific authorization of the child's parent(s) or legal guardian(s), as necessary to carry out school immunization requirements. For more information, *Immunization Record*

Disclosure Flyer, found on our website at www.mass.gov/dph/imm, click on ‘School Immunizations.’

Adult Staff Guidelines

There are no immunization requirements for teachers and other staff. However, MDPH recommends that teachers and staff remain up-to-date on their vaccinations to avoid possible exclusion from school during an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease. The document titled *Adult Immunizations: Massachusetts Recommendations and Requirements 2016* outlines the vaccine recommendations for adults.

Immunization Survey Results

High immunization rates continue to prevent outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in schools throughout Massachusetts. In 2015-2016, the immunization records of 72,230 kindergarten children from 1,330 schools were reviewed.

Results from the Immunization Survey of Children Entering Kindergarten

| School Year | No. of Records Reviewed | 5 DTaP | 4 Polio | 2 MMR | 3 Hep B | Immunity to Chickenpox ¹ | 5-4-2-3-2 Series ² | Medical Exemption | Religious Exemption |
|-------------|-------------------------|--------|---------|-------|---------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 2015-16 | 72,230 | 95% | 97% | 96% | 98% | 96% | 93% | 0.3% | 1.1% |
| 2014-15 | 74,869 | 93% | 95% | 95% | 97% | 94% | 91% | 0.3% | 1.1% |

¹Immunity to chickenpox disease includes children who have a documented physician-certified reliable history of chickenpox disease or 2 doses of varicella vaccine.

²5-4-2-3-2 Series: 5 DTaP and 4 Polio and 2 MMR and 3 Hepatitis B and 2 Varicella.

While the rate of religious exemptions in 2015-16 remained unchanged from 2014-15, in general, it has been increasing in recent years. We ask you to review your school policies and practices regarding exemptions. The resources below are available to help you communicate with vaccine-hesitant parents. These documents can be accessed online at the websites listed:

- *Personal belief exemptions for vaccination put people at risk. Examine the evidence for yourself* www.immunize.org/catg.d/p2069.pdf.

Please note that the only exemptions permitted in MA are medical and religious exemptions. Philosophical exemptions are not permitted. A physician statement must be on file for medical exemptions and a parent statement must be on file for religious exemptions.

- *What if you don't immunize your child?* www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4017.pdf.
- *Vaccine Information and Resources for Providers and Parents* – a resource sheet developed by MDPH <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/id/immunization/vaccine-safety.html>.

Massachusetts school immunization regulations have been very effective in preventing the outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases. Continued enforcement of the immunization regulations is essential to the health of our children.

Your efforts in completing this survey will contribute to protecting our children from vaccine preventable diseases. Please use the worksheets and instructions to help you complete the survey. **Please retain copies of the survey and worksheets to facilitate follow-up on children and staff not fully immunized.** You may be chosen for a randomized audit of immunization records or be called to review your records by MDPH Immunization Program staff. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact the MDPH Immunization Assessment Unit at 617-983-4330. Thank you for your assistance with reporting of vaccination levels of kindergarten students.

Completed surveys should be submitted no later than October 28, 2016.