State to audit schools for vaccine law compliance

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State health officials plan to increase audits of public and private schools throughout the coming school year to ensure compliance with the new vaccination law that eliminates religious exemptions.

State Department of Health spokeswoman Jill Montag said schools are responsible for tracking immunizations and exemptions to ensure students are in compliance.

Audits will take time to complete, Montag said. There are more than 4,000 public, private and parochial schools in the state outside of New York City, according to state officials. Schools that don’t comply face a $2,000 fine per student admitted in violation of the law.

Children can attend school until June 30 so long as they have received the first age-appropriate dose of each mandated immunization no more than 14 days after the first day of school and can show within the first 30 days that they have scheduled follow-up appointments for future doses, Montag said.

After June 30, students without medical exemptions will not be able to attend school without being fully caught up on immunizations.

The state Health Department is working with the state Education Department and the Office of Children and Family Services to provide guidance to schools and day cares. The Health Department is also holding webinars for local health departments and health care professionals.

Rockland County officials said they have no part in monitoring compliance of a statewide law.

The state law eliminating religious exemptions for vaccines was passed in June amid an ongoing measles outbreak with nearly 1,050 cases in New York.

Rockland County has had 312 cases since the outbreak began last October, the most cases outside of New York City. The majority of cases have occurred in the Orthodox Jewish communities in Monsey and Spring Valley, but officials warn that anybody is at risk due to the small geographic size of the county.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports a total of 1,215 measles cases in 2019 so far, up from 372 cases in 2018. This is the most cases in the U.S. since 1992 and since measles was declared eliminated in 2000, according to the CDC.

Those opposed to the new law have protested and initiated court proceedings. Some families have left the state, decided to home-school their children or chosen to vaccinate despite it going against their beliefs.

About 26,000 students statewide previously claimed a religious exemption to vaccines, according to state health data. Medical exemptions are still valid and the state Health Department issued emergency rules for doctors on Aug. 16 to
limit potential abuse of them.

**Vaccinations**

The Rockland County Department of Health has been holding clinics and allows walk-ins for the MMR and other inoculations.

The second-floor clinic is at 50 Sanatorium Road, Building A, in Pomona. Evening appointments can be scheduled by calling 845-364-2534 during regular business hours.

Children’s appointments can be scheduled during adult immunization clinic hours.

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