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# N.J. Mandatory Flu Shots for Preschoolers Cause Outrage

First Preschool Flu Vaccination Rule Shocks Parents

By SHARYN ALFONSI  
Oct. 17, 2008



142 comments

New Jersey's Public Health Council stopped complaining last year about parents who don't vaccinate their children and took action. Now, New Jersey is the first state in the nation to require a flu shot for all children before they enroll in preschools and daycare centers.

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The compulsory vaccination for preschoolers is intended to promote public health, a move based on a recommendation from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which identified children under age 5 as a group particularly in need of vaccinations.

But the mandate has infuriated many parents, hundreds of whom gathered in protest Thursday outside the statehouse in Trenton.

Parents have formed advocacy groups and enlisted support online for fellow residents to sign their petition against the law. They've banned together to

The state requires that children receive the flu vaccine before preschool.

demand what they see as their right to choose what is injected in the bodies of their children.

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"I have a really big problem with mandatory flu shots in this country," said Louis Kuo-Habukus, a mother of three from New Jersey. "We need to have a choice."

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Parents flooded the statehouse, carrying signs with slogans like "Parent Power" and "My Child, My Choice," and chanting "No American should be forced to play vaccine roulette with their child."

They rallied for support of a "conscientious objectors" clause, which they want added to the bill. It would grant exemptions for children and parents who have a moral objection to the vaccination.

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Existing state law provides for medical and religious exemptions to mandatory vaccinations, but parents say that requests are not frequently granted by authorities. They also point to legislation that offers a similar conscientious belief exemption from vaccines in 19 other states.

But New Jersey officials oppose any laws allowing parents to opt out of the vaccine.

"If we allow parents to pick and choose what vaccines to give kids, we will potentially run the risk of weakening the public health of the entire community," said Dr. Tina Tan of the New Jersey State Department of Health.

By not getting your toddler vaccinated, the state argues, you risk

the spread of disease.

"Vaccines not only protect the child being vaccinated but also the general community and the most vulnerable individuals within the community," the New Jersey Health Department said in a statement.

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The state cited evidence from medical studies, which found that those who opted out from measles and pertussis vaccines were 22 times more likely to get the measles and six times as likely to get pertussis.



Health advocate, Gary Null, center foreground, addresses a large crowd in front of the statehouse... (Mel Evans/AP Photo)

The flu kills about 86 children, from infants to teens, each year, according to the CDC.

The state is backed by the CDC, which insists that the flu vaccine is safe. Still, some parents believe that vaccines are overused and not sufficiently proven to be effective or safe.

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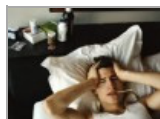
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Suspensions linger that compounds within vaccines are responsible for autism and other disorders when given to children early in life.

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