

IMMUNIZATION Update

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Welcoming Dionka C. Pierce, MPH, as the new Director of the Immunization Program

We are thrilled to welcome Dionka C. Pierce, MPH, as the new Director of the Immunization Program, who joined the team in August 2024. Dionka brings over 23 years of public health experience, with deep expertise in Louisiana's Title V Maternal and Child Health Programs. She previously served as Program Manager for Children's Special Health Services (CSHS), where she demonstrated leadership in budgeting, planning, and evaluation.

Recently, she returned to her roots, leading maternal and child health data surveillance and translation efforts within the Bureau of Family Health. Throughout her career, Dionka has been dedicated to helping families access vital healthcare services, from overseeing Louisiana's birth defects surveillance system to managing maternal health risk factors.



Dionka's wealth of knowledge and passion for public health will be invaluable as she steps into this new role. As she joins the Immunization Program, Dionka shared her excitement for the journey ahead:

"I am grateful for the opportunity to partner with the expertise of the professionals that make up the IZ team. I look forward to continuing the great work of the team and offering the excellent service our internal and external partners deserve and have come to expect."

We are confident that Dionka's leadership will strengthen our efforts to protect and serve communities across Louisiana.

If you get a chance, congratulate and send Dionka a warm welcome to the team!

Measles cases in 2024 reach 219 across 27 jurisdictions

As of October 17, 2024, a total of 269 measles cases were reported by 32 jurisdictions:

Arizona, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, **Louisiana**, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York City, New York State, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and West Virginia.



There have been 14 outbreaks (defined as 3 or more related cases) reported in 2024, and 70% of cases (191 of 269) are outbreak-associated. For comparison, 4 outbreaks were reported during 2023 and 49% of cases (29 of 59) were outbreak-associated.

Preventing Measles

Measles is highly contagious but preventable through vaccination. Healthcare providers typically administer the highly effective measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine in two doses during childhood. Ensuring that you and your family are up-to-date with vaccinations is the most effective way to prevent measles.

Symptoms of Measles

Symptoms of measles usually appear 7 to 14 days after exposure and can include:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Koplik spots (tiny white spots inside the mouth)
- A red rash that usually begins on the face and spreads downward to the rest of the body

If you or someone in your household develops these symptoms, it is important to seek medical advice promptly.

Resources

- [Measles Cases and Outbreaks | Measles \(Rubella\) | CDC](#)
- [Measles | La Dept. of Health](#)

Please consult your healthcare provider for more information on measles prevention and treatment.

Four-part video series on pediatric care and disease prevention

The Public Health Foundation, in collaboration with the [Wellness Equity Alliance](#), is pleased to announce the release of a video series for healthcare professionals and community health workers (CHWs) in support of pediatric vaccination efforts. This educational series provides best practices to

improve pediatric vaccination rates, reduce vaccine hesitancy among parents and caregivers and increase equitable healthcare access.

[View and share the Public Health Foundation's four-part video series.](#)



Hepatitis B screening and reporting guidelines for pregnant patients

The CDC recommends all pregnant individuals undergo hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) screening during each pregnancy, preferably in the first trimester, regardless of their vaccination status or previous testing history. This aligns with Louisiana's Sanitary Code, which classifies hepatitis B in pregnant women as a Class B disease. The state health department must receive notification of any positive hepatitis B result within one business day.



Pregnancy is not a contraindication to hepatitis B vaccination. Unvaccinated pregnant women should receive the hepatitis B vaccine, as recommended for all adults ages 19-59.

For more information or to report cases, contact the Louisiana Perinatal Hepatitis B Program at (504) 568-2600 or fax at (504) 568-2659. Visit Louisiana's Department of Health [website](#) for additional resources.

ICYMI: Updates on 2024 Louisiana legislative session and vaccinations

Louisiana's 2024 legislative session saw significant changes to the state's vaccination laws, reflecting evolving perspectives on public health and individual rights. Gov. Jeff Landry signed three important bills into law, impacting providers, school administrations and school health providers. These changes, set to take effect on August 1, 2024, emphasize the need for awareness and adherence to the new regulations.



Key Legislative Changes:

HB46 by Representative Edmonston

- **Summary:** Stipulates that no person shall be required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as a condition of enrollment or attendance at any public or non-public school.

- **Current Status:** Signed by the Governor, now Act 674.
- **Implications:** School administrators must ensure that COVID-19 vaccination is not a mandatory prerequisite for students enrolling in or attending their institutions.

HB47 by Representative Edmonston

- **Summary:** Mandates that all communications (from educational and other facilities list in La. R.S. 17:170) regarding immunization requirements must include information on available exemptions. Also provides that exemptions listed in La. R.S. 17:170 apply not only to students seeking to enter school, but also to those currently attending school.
- **Current Status:** Signed by the Governor, now Act 675.
- **Implications:** Schools must update their immunization communication materials to include exemption information and apply exemptions comprehensively to both new and current students.

HB908 by Representative Amedee

- **Summary:** Prohibits discrimination against students based on their vaccination status.
- **Current Status:** Signed by the Governor, now Act 460.
- **Implications:** Schools and providers must ensure that no student is discriminated against due to their vaccination status.

Action steps for providers and administrators:

- **Update Policies:** Review and revise school policies to align with the new laws, ensuring compliance by August 1, 2024.
- **Educate Staff:** Conduct training sessions for school health providers and administrative staff to ensure they understand the new requirements and can implement them effectively.
- **Communicate Changes:** Inform parents, students and staff about these legislative updates, highlighting how they affect school vaccination requirements and exemption processes.
- **Monitor Compliance:** Establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure ongoing compliance with the new laws and address any issues that arise promptly.

The changes enacted in this legislative session highlight the importance of balancing public health goals with individual rights. By staying informed and proactive, providers and school administrators can ensure a smooth transition and maintain a supportive educational environment for all students.

The content contained in this Update is general information and should not be construed as legal advice. It is not designed to be and should not be relied upon as your sole source of information when analyzing and resolving a specific legal issue. If you have specific questions regarding a particular legal issue, you should consult with your own attorney or with the legal counsel for your organization.



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