



2020 Policy Priorities

Immunize Colorado (formerly Colorado Children’s Immunization Coalition) works to protect Colorado families, schools and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases. To fulfill this mission, Immunize Colorado works with health care providers, public health departments, businesses, policy makers and community organizations across the state. By focusing on six key program areas – coalition building, community outreach, provider education, free and low-cost vaccines, data translation, and public policy – Immunize Colorado leverages the strengths and resources of our coalition members and community partners to maximize the effectiveness of our efforts.

Immunize Colorado engages stakeholders in immunization policy through its Policy Committee which meets monthly to advance proven, common-sense public policy solutions to help ensure safer schools and child cares to promote healthier communities. Additionally, in the fall of 2019, Immunize Colorado and other organizations committed to improving the state’s vaccination rates formed the Colorado Vaccinates coalition with the mission of advancing immunization policy in the 2020 state legislative session.

Immunize Colorado’s Policy Committee recommends actively supporting legislation in 2020 that advances and supports the following policy issues. These policy issues were approved by the Immunize Colorado Board of Directors in January 2020 with the understanding that Immunize Colorado will work with its Policy Committee members and other partners to advance these issues in our state. These issues are specific to 2020 and should be considered part of Immunize Colorado’s broader, long-term policy agenda.

POLICY ISSUE: [Establish a Healthy Schools Standard](#)

Colorado children have the right to be safe in their schools, but because of low vaccination rates across the state they are not. In 2017-18, Colorado’s **kindergarten coverage rate was last among reporting states for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)** at 88.7%. In 2018-19, the rate dropped more than a percentage point to 87.4%, well below the 95% needed for community protection.

Establishing a statewide immunization rate goal based on scientific evidence regarding community immunity protection for all schools – child care and K-12, public, charter and private – and increasing transparency of rates will empower schools, parents and communities to work together toward that

clearly-stated healthy schools standard. Providing resources and technical assistance to support schools and communities is a positive and constructive approach towards implementing locally appropriate strategies to reach the goal.

POLICY ISSUE: Reduce Administrative Burdens, Improve Data Accuracy

Complete and accurate immunization data is essential to helping parents, policymakers and healthcare providers and health officials make informed decisions. Colorado's immunization ***data infrastructure is incomplete and burdensome to use***, which limits our ability to implement effective public health prevention and response strategies.

Health care providers can be better supported in more consistently documenting immunization data in the Colorado Immunization Information System to enhance our state's immunization data completeness. Schools can be better supported in proactively notifying parents, staff and students of school immunization rates. Finally, parents can be better supported in having timely and accurate access to immunization data.

We need to invest in our immunization data infrastructure to make it more efficient, effective and useful to parents, schools and health officials.

POLICY ISSUE: Simplify, Standardize Exemptions & Implement an Equal Effort Standard

Colorado has one of the most lenient exemption policies in the country. Right now, it is far easier for a parent to sign a vaccine exemption than it is to take the time and effort to get their child vaccinated. So, it is not surprising that ***Colorado consistently ranks among the states with the highest levels of exemptions in the U.S.*** with 4.5% of kindergartners – almost 3,000 students - exempt from at least one vaccine in 2017-18 for non-medical reasons. Some Colorado schools report exemption rates as high as 78% for certain diseases like measles, polio, chickenpox, hepatitis B, and pertussis.

Immunize Colorado has historically supported evidence-based, medically accurate policy recommendations regarding medical and non-medical exemptions. Similarly, Immunize Colorado has historically opposed any deviations from the current processes for medical and non-medical exemptions, as it is vitally important to collect standardized information that can be easily identified and analyzed, especially in the case of a vaccine preventable disease outbreak.

Simplifying the non-medical exemption process and implementing an "equal-effort" provision is a measured policy step that preserves the non-medical exemption as an option and helps balance the interests of public health protection and parental choice. Simplifying, standardizing and implementing an equal effort standard would bring Colorado more in-line with national best practices.

POLICY ISSUE: Ensure strong budget and capacity for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's immunization program

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and local public health agencies are the backbone of Colorado's immunization delivery and information system. ***Adequate capacity and funding allow the Department to deliver evidence-based interventions across the state, to maintain the Colorado Immunization Information System and to be responsive to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.*** Colorado relies on a robust public health infrastructure that works to prevent disease and protect health in all communities.

The current budget request will provide \$1.5 million increase in core funding for local public health agencies to conduct immunization activities. The budget request also funds a one-time immunization awareness building campaign. Immunize Colorado recognizes the critical importance of conducting awareness building campaigns but understands they need to be adequately funded to be sustained over time and should be coupled with intervention activities, such as community-based immunization clinics.