

State Rule On Vaccines Best Course, Panel Says At Forum

It is better that Michigan's vaccine waiver rule - requiring parents to receive education on vaccines before signing a non-medical waiver for their child - not be eliminated or restricted, a forum spokesperson said Wednesday, because if it was eliminated and the state saw a major outbreak of a preventable disease, lawmakers may be pushed to eliminate any reasons other than medical for a vaccine waiver.

That is what happened in California after an outbreak of measles in Disneyland, Mark Navin, a professor of philosophy at Oakland University, said at a forum on vaccine waivers sponsored by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University. California is now one of three states that only allow vaccine waivers for a medical incompatibility with a vaccine, and he said he did not think it a good system if, for no other reason, it did not allow individuals to maintain a liberty right on the issue.

Mr. Navin, as did all the panelists at the forum - which included Robert Swanson, head of the immunization division in the Department of Health and Human Services, Rhonda Conner-Warren, a professor of nursing at MSU, and Terri Adams, a section manager in the state's immunization division - backed the controversial state rule which took effect in 2015.

Michigan is one of 18 states that have the most lenient rules on parents getting waivers from vaccinating their children. Waivers are allowed for medical, religious or philosophical reasons.

The state rule requiring a parent to receive information about vaccines before getting a waiver was enacted because the state had the seventh highest rate of vaccine waivers, Mr. Swanson said. The rule was adopted statewide after 10 counties adopted something similar and said the number of parents getting waivers dropped to 3.3 percent while the rest of the counties had a waiver rate of more than 6 percent.

Michigan is now the 29th in terms of vaccine waivers for 2016, Ms. Adams said, compared to 43rd. Though the state is not satisfied with that number and still hopes for better through its new promotional program, I Vaccinate.

Ms. Conner-Warren, who also works in a clinic in Detroit, said caretakers have to be careful to be vaccinated as well to provide greater immunity for children. And she said, "Autism does not equal" measles, mumps or rubella. Many vaccine opponents believe vaccines can cause autism, though there has been to date no credible scientific evidence of a connection between vaccines and autism.

And Mr. Swanson said he "strongly feels there is value in vaccines. I strongly believe they are safe."

But the rule remains extremely controversial in the state. There are now four bills in the House - HB 4425, HB 4426, HB 5162 and HB 5163 - that would limit the ability of the state to implement such a

rule. However, a first attempt to move the two bills in the House Education Reform Committee fell short of sufficient votes.

Just a week ago the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held the state's rule was constitutional and did not amount to a violation of an individual's right to free exercise of worship.

And while the forum's panel argued for the rule, more than a dozen people at the forum, all of them women with children, made it known they believed vaccines were dangerous.

Virtually all said they either had children who had not been vaccinated and were healthy, or that their child had been vaccinated and had suffered injuries.

Vanessa Lynn was one of the latter. She said her daughter developed verbal apraxia after receiving a vaccine. Verbal apraxia is a motor speech deficiency that can affect both children and adults. Ms. Lynn said her daughter had an MRI after she hit her head and had problems. She was then vaccinated, developed her condition and subsequent MRIs showed a change.

However, according to the website for the Childhood Apraxia of Speech Association of North America, research has not yet established any specific causes of the condition although it tends to be found in children with neurological impairment, complex neurodevelopmental disorders or idiopathic speech disorders.

A number of the women sought out [Rep. Hank Vaupel](#) (R-Handy Township), chair of the House Health Policy Committee, to tell them their stories. One, for example, said she had a miscarriage after getting a flu vaccine.

When the forum ended and a number of the opponents approached the panel, and a House sergeant stood at the podium.

Mr. Navin said he was a big supporter of the state's rule. And he said medical providers were now taking a more active role in promoting vaccination. Some 20-40 percent of pediatricians will now refuse to treat families if their children are not vaccinated, he said, and the American Academy of Pediatrics approved of this in 2016.

California had enacted legislation similar to Michigan's rule in 2014 and saw a dramatic increase in the number of children being vaccinated, he said.

Then a widely publicized outbreak of measles occurred at Disneyland, and the state adopted a new law allowing vaccine waivers only for medical reasons. The law created new issues, as parents may decide to pull their children from schools, private schools may continue to educate children without them being vaccinated.

And the Los Angeles Times recently indicated that the number of physicians in California writing dubious or fraudulent medical waivers has tripled, Mr. Navin said.

A rule like Michigan's still allows parents to exercise their liberty rights, he said, even if that is a wrong decision.

Plus, he worried the issue overall was becoming politicized. In California the new statute was supported by all the legislative Democrats and virtually none of the legislative Republicans. Hyper-partisanship on the issue is a dangerous path, he said.

Adding to the controversy over vaccines and their medical value, a case in Oakland County - where a mother in a divorce case refused to obey a judicial order to have her children vaccinated and was jailed - is creating new issues. One audience member said medical experts have heard now of three similar divorce situations and there is a question of whether physicians should act as expert witnesses in such cases.

And Mr. Navin warned opponents of vaccines that ending or limiting the state's rule with a resultant large outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease such as measles or pertussis could cause parents who support vaccinations - who are the majority of parents - to demand stricter requirements.

Which could mean the state would adopt a provision barring any waivers except those for medical reasons, he said.

Reprinted with written permission.