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Follow-Up on Measles and School Immunizations - Alaska

Investigation of recent outbreaks of measles in Alaska school children led to the discovery that the state's school immunization law was not being enforced. In an effort to control a large measles outbreak in Fairbanks, all school children there were required to show proof of vaccination against measles or be excluded from school beginning January 24. During the 3 week period before the deadline, over 2,875 of 11,727 children enrolled in the Fairbanks school district were vaccinated against measles. On January 24, 1,251 children were excluded from Fairbanks schools. One week later, less than 90 children were still out of school because of failure to meet immunization requirements.

A statewide school immunization record review was initiated on January 10, and the deadline of March 1, 1977, was set for all school children throughout the state to be immunized against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, poliomyelitis, measles, and rubella in compliance with state law. Proof of immunization was required and defined as: 1) an international immunization certificate, 2) a signed statement by a physician listing the dates of the immunizations, or 3) a copy of clinic or health center records. A history of having had the clinical illness was not considered a substitute for immunization. Primary immunization against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, and poliomyelitis requires multiple vaccinations; therefore, children not immunized against these diseases were required to receive at least 1 immunization before the March 1 deadline. These children have been identified and are being followed to ensure completion of the total series. Only a single immunization was required against measles and rubella.

On March 1, 7,418 of 89,109 (8.3%) school children were excluded from Alaska schools for failure to meet immunization requirements. Two weeks later, 201 (0.2%) remained out of school, and on April 1, fewer than 50 were excluded. In the period from January 1 to March 1, over 35,000 children were immunized with more than 56,000 immunizations. Two hundred eighty six children claimed a religious exemption; 178 claimed a medical exemption. No serious side effects to any of the immunizations have been reported.

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