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NEWS RELEASE

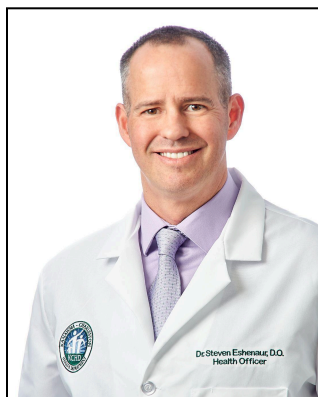
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Kanawha-Charleston Health Officer Says Weakening Childhood Immunization Laws Is Not In Best Interest of Children

CHARLESTON, W.VA. — The Health Officer of the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department says any legislation that would allow for nonmedical exemptions to West Virginia’s current childhood immunization laws is not in the best interest of the state’s children.



Dr. Steven Eshenaur, who has spent his life serving patients as an emergency room doctor and a military physician, says West Virginia’s laws are among the best he’s seen both at home and abroad. “Our current compulsory childhood immunization laws are highly effective, safe and they save lives. In fact, the state’s childhood immunization rates are among the best in the country.”

Eshenaur said he is deeply concerned about the many bills currently under consideration by the West Virginia Legislature that have been introduced in both the Senate and House seeking to provide for nonmedical exemptions to the state’s already-effective program.

Generally, the bills seek to provide for non-medical exemptions to childhood immunizations either for philosophical or religious reasons.

“The beneficial effects of childhood immunizations cannot be overstated,” Eshenaur said. “We stand at a crossroads. A choice must be made. The options are disease or healthy children. The answer is easy: We should choose healthy children.”

Diseases such as measles, polio, mumps, and whooping cough, to name a few, are rarely seen in Mountain State communities because of the state’s current regulations. In states such as Ohio, where nonmedical exemptions have been allowed, multiple outbreaks of measles have occurred. “Thanks to our current system, we don’t have that problem here,” Eshenaur said.

The most recent outbreak in Columbus resulted in 85 cases of measles of which four out of 10 children required hospitalization. “It’s simple: That outbreak in Ohio could have been easily prevented by immunization. We do not want these diseases in our communities! I’ve seen it in third-world countries and, sadly, we are seeing it stateside now with polio in New York City. Let us continue on the road of progress and healthy prosperity for our children, and not regress into a third-world state.”

Parents and concerned residents can find the state’s childhood immunization laws here, [West Virginia Code 16-3-4](#). Proposed bills can be found by searching “immunization or vaccination” [here](#). Eshenaur encouraged residents to stay informed about bills pertaining to childhood immunization, and to address concerns to their legislators.

“If you have ever seen a child with polio, you’d never consider opening the door and inviting these debilitating and deadly diseases into our communities to scourge upon our children. We have a duty to protect our future generations and make decisions that keep them free of disease,” Eshenaur said.

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