INTRODUCTION

School nurses play a vital role in primary prevention of disease in children. Millions of school days are lost each year for kindergarten through 12th-grade public school students in the United States because of infectious diseases (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2011). Schools inherently foster the transmission of infections from person to person because students and school staff are in a group setting with close contact (CDC, 2011). One of the most significant ways to protect a child from serious disease and infection is through immunization (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2012). School nurses are involved with all levels of disease prevention from tracking vaccination records, administering immunizations, providing education to families, the school system and the community, tracking disease outbreak and treatment of diseases (Stanhope & Lancaster, 2008).

Michigan Laws/Regulations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>§ 333.9205</th>
<th>Requires that a parent/guardian of a child provide for the child's immunization by an authorized health professional, physician, local health department, clinic, or other agency offering immunizations for diseases and within an age period prescribed by the department.</th>
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<tr>
<td>§ 333.9208</td>
<td>A parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis applying to have a child registered for the first time in a school and a parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis of a child entering the sixth grade, shall present to school officials, at the time of registration or not later than the first day of school, a certificate of immunization or statement of exemption.</td>
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<tr>
<td>§ 333.9215</td>
<td>Immunization exemption requirements.</td>
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<td>§ 380.1177</td>
<td>The parent/guardian of a child enrolling in school for the first time must submit a certificate showing required immunizations have been given; or a physician-signed waiver that required immunizations could not be given because of medical contradictions or a parent/guardian signed waiver that for religious or other reasons the immunization has not been given.</td>
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<td>§ 333.9209</td>
<td>Schools are required to report their students' immunization status to their local health departments.</td>
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<td>McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act</td>
<td>The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is a federal law that Michigan schools must adhere to which ensures immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children and youth. This Act requires schools to enroll homeless children and youth immediately, even if they lack normally required documents, such as immunization records or proof of residence. McKinney-Vento provides federal funding to states for the purpose of supporting district programs that serve homeless students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>§ 333.9206</td>
<td>A parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis applying to have a child registered for the first time in a school in this state and, beginning January 1, 2014, a parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis of a child entering the seventh grade, shall present to school officials, at the time of registration or not later than the first day of school, a certificate of immunization or statement of exemption. A teacher or principal shall not permit a child to enter or attend school unless a certificate indicating that a minimum of 1 dose of an immunizing agent against each of the diseases specified by the department has been received and certified to by a health professional against each of the diseases specified by the department has been received and certified to by a health professional or local health department. A parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis having a child registered with only these minimum doses of immunizing agents shall present an updated certificate of immunization within 4 months after initial attendance showing that the immunizations have been completed as prescribed by the department.</td>
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Role of the School Nurse

The role of the school nurse is vital to ensuring compliance in vaccinations of school aged children. The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) believes that immunizations are an important part of primary prevention in the battle against communicable diseases and that school nurses can “create awareness and influence action related to mandated and recommended immunizations in the school community” (NASN, 2012, p.1).

Monitoring/Compliance: The state of Michigan has laws to protect children and the community from communicable disease and requires certain vaccines be obtained for students entering schools. School nurses are skilled in reviewing students’ immunization records for compliance. They are responsible for keeping accurate records of immunizations on all students, and flagging those students who are exempt in order that those students can be excluded should an outbreak of a communicable disease occur.

Documentation: School nurses coordinate the accurate documentation of students’ immunizations. The Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR) was developed in 1988 (Michigan Care Improvement Registry [MCIR], 2012) as a centralized immunization registry. The program tracks immunizations that were given and stores them in an online database that is viewable by authorized users (MCIR, 2012). The benefit of this type of electronic documentation is that it keeps records of immunizations in a centralized location which provides for more accurate and complete data collection. School nurses have access to this valuable tool.

Resources: The school nurse is instrumental in assisting families to obtain access to care to receive vaccines. Vaccination is usually covered by insurance or can be received at no cost to children from low-income families through a federally funded program, Vaccines for Children (VFC) (USDHHS, n.d.), but for some families the challenge may be knowledge of where to go to receive vaccines or securing transportation to get there.

Education: School nurses should have comprehensive knowledge of immunizations and the diseases they prevent (Selekman, 2013). They have a primary role in educating people on current and accurate facts. As health educators they provide current and evidence based information to parents/guardians on vaccine safety, specific diseases and respond to parents concerns for refusal of immunizations (i.e. multiple vaccines at one time, religious beliefs, and side effects). As health advocates, they dispel myths and misinformation obtained over the internet or portrayed in the media that may create parental questions or fear. The goal is to educate, motivate and prepare parents about the importance of not only the required but other recommended immunizations. School nurses are also a resource for school districts and the community regarding communicable disease prevention and health law requirements.

Surveillance: School nurses have acute assessment skills that allow them identify early signs of infectious disease and respond quickly (Selekman, 2013). School nurses are the front line of defense for many chronic and acute
health care issues in the community (Bergren, 2009) conducting disease surveillance and reporting, providing a vital link between the school and the public health community.

**School located vaccine clinics:** In some communities, a partnership is developed with the school district, health department or other health agency and the school nurse to administer vaccines at a school located clinic. School nurses often coordinate and facilitate the event, including administration of vaccines.

**REFERENCES**


**Resources**

- **Required Childhood Immunizations for Michigan Schools**
- **Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR)**
- **CDC Fact Sheets - Diseases and the Vaccines that Prevent Them**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Vaccines and Immunizations**