**Fiscal Facts: State’s Immunization Rates Still Depressed**

Amid the pandemic, health officials worried that debate and misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines could influence public attitudes toward other vaccinations.

New data appears to bear out these concerns, as immunization rates among schoolchildren have dropped nationally and in Wisconsin. Vaccination rates for Wisconsin schoolchildren rebounded somewhat in 2022-23 after declining in 2021, but remained below pre-pandemic levels.

Students who meet the minimum immunization requirements have had the age-appropriate schedule of vaccines protecting them from diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella, polio, and chickenpox (also known as varicella).

In 2022-23, 10.1% of WI students did not meet immunization requirements. That was down 1.2 percentage points from 21-22, but still higher than every year in the past decade. In each year from 2013 to 2018, the rate was below 8%.

Any students who have immunization records on file but are missing the required doses are considered “behind schedule.” Statewide, districts with high rates of economically disadvantaged families tend to have higher rates of students behind on immunization schedules.

Students also are able to waive school immunization requirements for health reasons or personal or religious convictions. Over the past two decades, statewide personal conviction waivers have increased from 2.6% of students in 2003 to 4.6% in 2023; health and religious waivers have remained relatively flat. Students whose families waive immunization requirements on personal conviction grounds were more likely to be in rural communities.

Declining immunization rates is a statewide challenge that requires localized solutions. One area in which the state can play an immediate role is improving state data collection so that all districts report accurate and consistent information.

At the local level, districts with large portions of students behind schedule could be targeted with vaccination clinics, perhaps coinciding with school registration or back-to-school events.

Local and state officials may also wish to gather more information about districts with high rates of students waiving immunization requirements on personal conviction grounds. A better understanding of families’ reasons for this decision could inform campaigns to explain the benefits of vaccines and improve immunization rates.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*