Dear Committee members of the Children & Families and the Health Policy Committees;

My name is Michelle Thorne and I am a Registered Nurse with Calhoun County Public Health Department. I would like to share with you our experiences with the new immunization waiver law. There are three objectives that we try to achieve in the educational process with the parent or guardian who wants to sign a waiver for immunizations.

1. Identify the reason for the waiver and address any misinformation with scientific resources. Very often, a brochure about vaccine safety is offered that has been created by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Vaccine.chops.edu
2. Address the process when a vaccine-preventable outbreak occurs in the school setting. Parents need to understand when their child is exposed to the disease; they will be given one of three options to respond. The three options consist of vaccination – if appropriate, prophylactic treatment such as antibiotics – if appropriate and exclusion from school/daycare to monitor for symptoms of the disease. This period can last for the entire incubation period of the disease. Pertussis and Chicken Pox, for example, is 21 days that a child would be excluded from school.
3. Advise parents to notify any emergency care providers regarding their child's immunization status as not up-to-date. This is critical for the child exhibiting symptoms of a vaccine-preventable disease should the medical provider assume this child is up-to-date and not consider these diseases in their differential diagnosis.

A typical session with a parent that is adamant about waiving all vaccines will last about 15 minutes to cover the above material and any questions or comments they may have. A parent who is questioning the process of vaccination will take longer to address their questions or concerns. Very often a parent will state that they do not want vaccines because they are concerned about what is in them. We have had parents write that they do not want the following ingredients injected into their children: mercury, rat cells, monkey cells, aborted fetus cells, toxins, etc. We address these concerns by informing them of what is in the vaccines. Mercury, for example, has been removed from all but two vaccines which the manufacturers have also made a mercury-free alternative for those.

We have yet to have any parent storm out on us, frequently they thank us for the information we have given them and we have even accepted information they want to give us on their perspective. We inform parents that at any time they can call us with questions or can vaccinate with any of the vaccines should they change their mind.

Calhoun County Public Health Department has even taken this one step further by ensuring that all of our public health RN's assigned to each of our public school districts are trained and able to provide the waiver session at each school location and offer immunizations onsite as well. The relationship that is built between the school nurse and the school community creates a trusting environment where parents can work with the school nurses.

While we have not changed any parent's decision to vaccinate that same day, we have had parents tell us that they will do more research and consider certain vaccines. In our experience, we consider this a win-win and a 100% success rate if we have been able to meet all three of our objectives above. While we can see that making that appointment for this session can be inconvenient and parents who are anti-vaccine may present to the health department feeling defensive about their position, we try to listen to what they have to say and respect their position. We hope to continue to find ways to address their fears and concerns with vaccines so that one day we see the end to many devastating preventable diseases.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need more information on this matter.

Michelle Thorne MSN RN

Michelle Thorne MSN RN
Personal Health Services Manager
Calhoun County Public Health Department
Phone: 269-969-6334 Fax: 269-969-6488
mthorne@calhouncountymi.gov