

Manhattan Beach Unified School District
Medical Advisory Board
Childhood Immunization Position Paper

The health and safety of all students attending Manhattan Beach Schools is the foundation for Manhattan Beach School District Medical Advisory Board, established in 2002. The Board includes volunteer health care professionals, including nurses, health educators, dentists, and physicians with various specialty training. Recently the board studied the numbers of students who have not completed the course of childhood immunizations recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Although the actual number of MBUSD students missing vaccinations is not alarming, there is a notable trend locally and nationwide; because of this we have seen an increase in vaccine-preventable diseases such as the local pertussis outbreak in 2005 and the worldwide measles outbreak in 2008.

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that “vaccines save lives and protect against the spread of disease”, and that “vaccine-preventable diseases can have dangerous consequences”. We believe that vaccines are extremely effective, are safe, and are important. Vaccines are held to the highest standard of safety. Immunizations, like all medications, may have some adverse effects but the decision not to immunize also involves risk. There is risk to the individual, and to the community.

Vaccines are tested by the FDA, and all data is reviewed by the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). Manufactures of vaccines are monitored by the FDA and each vaccine lot is safety-tested. Every physician is mandated to report adverse effects of vaccines to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Any reported adverse effect receives prompt recognition, study and response.

There has been concern in the past that thimerosal, the mercury-based preservative once used in several vaccines could contribute to autism spectrum disorders. Valid scientific studies have discounted this link. Nevertheless, thimerosal has not been used in routinely recommended childhood vaccines since 2001. Thimerosal does exist in some flu preparations, but not those offered to children under the age of two years.

Autism is a collection of disorders and studies do show that the prevalence of autism has risen. However, evidence from several studies examining trends in vaccine use and changes in autism frequency do not support association of vaccine use and development of autism. These findings are supported by the CDC and AAP.

There has been concern about combination vaccines, such as MMR. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that the MMR ‘has been studied carefully and found to be safe’. Healthy children have immune systems that meet multiple exposures throughout their lives, and these immune systems are equipped to handle multiple exposures.

Please note that if your child is exempt from immunizations, and there is a disease outbreak, the Health Officer may legally order the school to temporarily exclude your child from school for as long as 21 days or more for his/her protection and the prevention of illness in others. It is important that families and physicians protect children from preventable and potentially dangerous disease by adhering to the immunization schedule provided by the CDC, AAP, and FAAP. Each child is different and deserves careful choices regarding childhood immunizations; those decisions should be made by families and physicians together.