

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Common Barriers to Compliance with Student Immunization Requirements

Vaccinating children is an important safety measure to protect school-age children, as well as the general public, from preventable infectious diseases. States set their own rules for required immunizations for children to attend school: Washington requires all enrolling students to show proof they have been vaccinated against 11 vaccine-preventable diseases or show proof of acquired immunity or exemption. As in 17 other states, Washington parents may claim vaccine exemptions for personal/philosophical, religious or medical reasons.

Parents must submit a Certificate of Immunization Status (CIS) or a Certificate of Exemption (COE) to their child's school before the child can attend. Depending on the records submitted, schools report the student's immunization status to the Department of Health as complete, conditional, or out of compliance. Children lacking a complete CIS or COE on the first day of school are out of compliance. State law requires the school to exclude these students from school until proof of immunization, certification of exemption, or approved vaccination schedule has been provided.

Department of Health records for the 2017-2018 school year show that 8 percent of kindergartners and 15.4 percent of 6th-graders statewide had an out-of-compliance status. This means they are not fully vaccinated, or lack a legal exemption, or they lack the required documentation to show their immunization status. Stakeholders told us some school districts do not enforce state law, which requires them to exclude out-of-compliance students. In addition, current law does not include any enforcement mechanisms to hold administrators accountable for allowing out-of-compliance students to attend school.

This audit will examine how district and school officials ensure they exclude students who do not meet statutory immunization requirements from attending school. The audit also will assess whether districts can help lower the barriers that families face in obtaining vaccinations.

Scope and objectives

This audit seeks to answer the following questions:

- Why are noncompliance rates for student immunizations high for some school districts?
- What are common barriers to families vaccinating their children, and how can schools and districts help minimize them?

Timing

We expect to publish the report in fall of 2019.



Office of the
Washington
State Auditor
Pat McCarthy

**Director of
Performance Audit:
Scott Frank**

(360) 902-0376

Scott.Frank@sao.wa.gov

**Principal
Performance Auditor:
Tania Fleming**

(360) 725-5627

Tania.Fleming@sao.wa.gov

**Senior Performance
Auditor:**

Olha Bilobran

(360) 725-5606

Olha.Bilobran@sao.wa.gov

Office of the
Washington State
Auditor

P.O. Box 40021

Olympia, WA

98504-0021

www.sao.wa.gov

[@WASateAuditor](https://twitter.com/WASateAuditor)

April 2019