

Unvaccinated

students In measles outbreak, parents ask: How are these kids allowed in school?

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When news broke this weekend that two unvaccinated students in the Spencerport Central School District had been diagnosed with measles, a question at the top of many parents' minds was "How do unvaccinated students get into school?"

The answer lies within state law.

While all students entering or attending public, private or parochial school in New York are required to be immune to diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, poliomyelitis, hepatitis B, varicella and meningococcal disease, there are two exemptions to the rule:

■ Medical exemptions that require a statement from a physician saying that immunization

may be detrimental to the child's health; and

■ Religious exemptions that require a statement from the child's parent or guardian stating that they object to immunizations

due to sincere and genuine religious beliefs.

Officials with the Monroe County Department of Public Health said on Saturday that the two

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Spencerport students affected had not been vaccinated for the disease. They have been quarantined to their homes and will not return to school until they are well. As a precaution, four other students at the school who have also not been immunized were told not to return to the school until Feb. 13.

Measles is one of the most contagious viruses there are. The illness can be spread by an infected person even before they develop the measles rash, and the virus can live for up to two hours in an airspace where the infected person coughed or sneezed.

If untreated, measles can lead to brain infections, brain damage and/or death.

of unvaccinated public school children are in Rochester's School No. 15, where about 12 percent of kids lack vaccines, and that district's Rochester International Academy, where about 11 percent of students lack vaccinations.

In suburban districts, the highest percentage of unvaccinated children attend Webster's Spry Middle School. State data shows about 4 percent of students there were unvaccinated during the 2017-18 school year.

At Spencerport's Canal View Elementary School, which the students who came down with measles last week attend, 98.1 percent of students are fully vaccinated.

A review of state data for the 2017-18 school year shows most public schools in the county have high vaccination rates. For public schools, the countywide median for completely immunized students is 98.8 percent.

Private schools have the same median rate, but some individual schools have high rates of unvaccinated children. Those schools include Southeast Christian Academy, where nearly 26 percent of students lack immunizations, and Greece Christian School, where about 22 percent of students are unvaccinated.

The highest percentage

There have now been three confirmed cases of measles in Monroe County this year. In early January, the health department confirmed that an unvaccinated toddler had contracted the virus while traveling outside the United States.

Other communities in New York have been hardhit in recent months by a measles outbreak. As of Jan. 24, there have been 122 confirmed cases of the highly contagious respiratory disease in Rockland County.

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