

NEW VACCINE FOR NY STUDENTS

Meningococcal vaccine required for those entering grades 7, 12

JON CAMPBELL @JONCAMPBELLGAN

ALBANY - Add meningitis to the list of vaccines required to attend school in New York. ♦ Starting next school year, students entering seventh grade will be required to receive a meningococcal vaccine, which protects against certain diseases including a form of meningitis. Before 12th grade, students will have to receive a booster shot. ♦ The new requirement was among 40 bills signed into law late Monday by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, and was approved despite a lobbying effort by vaccine skeptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Cuomo's former brother-in-law.

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According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1,000 to 1,200 people nationwide contract meningitis each year.

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Vaccine

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About 1,000 to 1,200 people nationwide contract meningitis each year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "This new law sends a clear message — we are not willing to lose one more person to a vaccine preventable illness," said Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, a Sullivan County Democrat who sponsored the measure. "Meningococcal meningitis is deadly, and it moves quickly. Making the vaccination mandatory is not only good policy, it's good medicine."

The bill had wide support from the medical community, including the state Medical Society, the March of Dimes and the Association of County Health Officials.

But it drew opposition from Kennedy and those who believe there is a link between vaccines containing thimerosal — a mercury-containing preservative — and developmental disorders in children. That contention is disputed by the CDC, the American Association of Pediatrics, Autism Speaks and the Institute of Medicine. Two of the three available meningococcal vaccinations have no thimerosal, while the third has a trace amount when administered in multi-dose form. The bill led Kennedy to travel to Albany in June, where he spoke out against it at a news conference near the Capitol.

Later that month, the state Legislature approved the measure by a wide margin. Cuomo approved the bill without comment.

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