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Measles vaccinations highest in Weatherford, Mineral Wells ISDs among 18 local schools in two counties

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Health officials say they are on alert as more than 140 cases in Texas have been identified since January.

Courtesy



Public and private schools in Parker and Palo Pinto counties reported healthy kindergarten vaccination rates in latest state data.

That's against a background of more than 140 measles cases confirmed in Texas since January.

There has been one death reported in Texas, of a child who was not immunized.

Of the 18 schools in the two counties, Mineral Wells and Weatherford ISDs reported the highest and second highest rates for the kindergarten MMR shot, respectively, for the 2023-24 school year.

Two doses of the MMR, standing for measles, mumps and rubella, are required by the state.

Weatherford ISD reported a 95.25% rate that year, while Mineral Wells ISD came in at 95.49%.

The percentages translate to 233 incoming Mineral Wells Ram kindergartners who took the shot, leaving 11 who opted out and 547 immunized Kangaroos and 26 not, the districts said this week.

"As a reminder, our district's lead nurse will generate a weekly report identifying students due for vaccinations," Mineral Wells ISD Superintendent's Assistant Lizbeth Cupeles said. "This information will be provided to campus nurses to assist in reaching out to families."

Rates in 12 of the 16 schools below those two ranged from 82.35% (Brock ISD) to 93.59% (Millsap ISD).

The lowest rates were reported in private schools in Weatherford, Victory Baptist Academy (60%), and Coutts Christian Academy (66.67%).

Trinity Christian Academy in Willow Park reported an 80% vaccination rate, while at Weatherford Christian School it was 90%.

“You’ll see some private schools that have high rates, and you’ll see some that have low rates,” said Dr. Alice Phillips, a pediatrician at the Cook Children’s Medical Center.

In addition to the Campbell Clinic, Cook’s and the Mineral Wells Health Department, MMR vaccines typically are available at urgent care facilities and pharmacies.

Adult patients of Palo Pinto General Hospital’s primary care clinics are directed to those facilities, spokeswoman Megan Hudson said.

“Additionally,” she said, “adults looking for the MMR vaccine can visit the CDC’s website and search ‘MMR vaccine for adults near me,’ which will direct them to (Texas State Health Services) locations and pharmacies that provide the vaccine.”

The state health department says the first shot should be after the first birthday, well in time for children to join their germy peers in kindergarten and pre-K.

Mineral Wells ISD Lead Nurse Ginger Donohoe reports there has not been a measles case in the district in “the past recent years.”

The same was reported this week by Weatherford ISD, Cook Children’s Medical Center, the Campbell Clinic in the Parker County Hospital District and at Palo Pinto General Hospital.

But they all say they are on alert.

“Yes, our leadership and medical staff closely monitor public health concerns, including the rise in measles cases,” Hudson said. “We have protocols in place to respond effectively should measles cases emerge in our area.

Phillips at Cook Children’s urged parents and guardians to have their children immunized now if they haven’t been.

“Measles can kill,” she said. “We know, for Texas, one to three out of every 1,000 children that gets measles will die. We are not fearmongering with that — it is real.”

She described a complacency in some people that’s borne of success.

“I think it’s just not real to them,” Phillips said, contrasting that with people asking for the Respiratory Syncytial Virus shot when RSV gained public awareness. “Sadly, one of the problems is (vaccines) have done such a good job they’ve put themselves out of business.

“I think what this measles outbreak is showing us is these diseases are still a risk. ... When I looked at Parker County ... there has definitely been a decline in the vaccines taken in the last four or five years.”

The disease has hit the country as a whole so hard, she said, that foreigners traveling here are now required to be immunized for measles.

“We were the only country without travel advice on measles,” Phillips said.

Looks like flu

Measles looks pretty much like the flu at the outset.

“What’s challenging with measles is the rash,” Phillips said. “It appears on day four of the illness. and you go, hmm, could this be more than just a cough or the flu?”

The three ways to opt out of immunizations are a conscientious or religious objection, a doctor’s opinion it could harm a child and military affiliation.

Dr. Phillips and the office manager at the Campbell Clinic, Cortney Calhoun, both advocated being direct with parents who are vaccine skeptical or hesitant.

“The first step is, you have to listen to them,” Phillips said. “And you have to tell them, ‘I care about your concerns.’ They have to realize we have the same goal, and our goal is to keep your child safe and healthy.”

Calhoun estimated less than 20% of the local population refuses vaccinations.

“There’s definitely people that are skeptical or unsure or only want to do one (shot) here, one there, kind of on a delayed schedule,” she said. “They definitely have concerns about it. and we do carry the vaccinations for (MMR), for patients that are insured and that are not insured.”

She also is acutely aware of the virus’s highly contagious nature.

“Especially for the non-vaccinated,” Calhoun added. “It definitely is a dangerous respiratory illness. It’s spread through droplets in the air, breath, sneezes.”

She said “the textbook” rule is the virus remains in the air at least two hours after an infected person has left a room. She added staff at the Campbell Clinic are aware of daily reports of the outbreak to the west.

“It’s scary,” Calhoun said. “Many of us have children of our own, school-age children. But I’m thankful that it’s not any closer at this time.”

But it’s close enough, the doctor added.

“It’s in our state,” Phillips said. “So now is the time for parents to act. Don’t wait until we have a case at Cook’s.”

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