

# Blue Mountain School: A public health case study of what not to do

By ACSH Staff — April 7, 2011

Blue Mountain School, an alternative education school in Floyd County, Virginia, is [learning](#) <sup>[1]</sup> about public health the hard way as at least 30 people, including 23 of its 45 students, have been diagnosed with pertussis, better known as whooping cough. After the devastating outbreak in California last year that claimed the lives of ten infants, you would think parents in Virginia would know better, but according to Dr. Molly O'Dell, director of the New River Health District, the outbreak was caused by residents failing to get themselves and their children vaccinated, as recommended by the CDC and the American Association of Pediatrics.

Even though Virginia law mandates that schools and day-care centers have documentation that all children receive their age-appropriate immunizations, several families at Blue Mountain have circumvented these requirements by obtaining religious exemptions. Now the school, which will be shut down until Monday, and the Virginia Department of Health are trying to contain the outbreak and won't allow students who have not had antibiotic treatment to resume their classes until they have been quarantined for 21 days since the last known day of exposure. Due to inadequate levels of vaccination, the number of pertussis cases in Virginia increased by 72 percent from 2009 to 2010.

Instead of encouraging children and adults to get vaccinated, Shelly Emmett, the school's director, said, "We're not taking one stance over another...but we're setting up guidelines."

"But she *should* be taking one stance over another," says ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom. "That is her job. That irresponsible cop-out serves only to convey the false message that all opinions should be equally considered and respected, as if this were a discussion on poetry. It's not. This kind of feel-good gibberish ended up giving 30 people a serious illness that was easily preventable. Perhaps the parents ought to reconsider their ill-conceived beliefs and give this incident some rational thought."

---

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2011/04/07/blue-mountain-school-a-public-health-case-study-of-what-not-to-do>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.roanoke.com/news/roanoke/wb/282419>