With the new school year well under way, the CDC has some good news to report. Its annual vaccination coverage report documents the vaccination coverage among our nation’s kindergarten children. Although the report found high levels of vaccination coverage overall, it also highlights clusters of unvaccinated children, putting certain communities at risk for outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

The report is based on data from federally funded state, local and territorial immunization programs and includes vaccination coverage for a total of over four million kindergarten children. According to the report, 94.7 percent of kindergarten children received 2 doses of measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR), 95 percent received the diphtheria, tetanus toxoid, and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP), and 93.3 percent received two doses of the varicella vaccine. Total exemption rate was about 2 percent. The highest rate of exemption was reported in Oregon, and two states, Kansas and Maine, reported increases in percentage of kindergarteners with exemptions. And although the overall numbers are good, 26 states and DC reported vaccination rates below 95 percent for two doses of the MMR vaccine. Colorado’s kindergarteners have the lowest rates of vaccination overall, with only 81 percent of them receiving the MMR, DTaP and/or the varicella vaccine.

The takeaway from the report is this: Low vaccination coverage and high exemption levels can cluster within communities. Immunization programs might have access to school vaccination coverage and exemption rates at a local level for counties, school districts, or schools that can identify areas where children are more vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases. Health promotion efforts in these local areas can be used to help parents understand the risks for vaccine-preventable diseases and the protection that vaccinations provide to their children.

And surprisingly, a state used to being last in measures of children’s health, Mississippi, actually reports the highest level of children’s vaccination rates, with almost 100 percent of kindergarteners reportedly being up-to-date on required immunizations. Mississippi and West Virginia are the only states in the country that do not allow religious exemptions. Not surprisingly, there are residents who are not happy with these numbers, specifically one Lindey Magee, co-
director of the group Mississippi Parents for Vaccine Rights, who calls Mississippi's laws archaic and barbaric.

We, however, wholeheartedly agree with Joy Sennett, Director of Communicable Diseases at the Mississippi State Department of Health who says, Mississippi's strong school entry law protects immunized children as well as others around them who can't be immunized because of age or valid medical reasons. School vaccination requirements are one of the best methods of assuring that our children can be protected. In the area of childhood vaccinations, other states should follow the lead of Mississippi.

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2014/10/20/vaccination-coverage-among-united-states-kindergarteners

Links
[1] http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6341a1.htm