

When it comes to personal exemptions, California is unfortunately not alone

By ACSH Staff — June 8, 2015



California ^[1] seems ^[2] to ^[3] get ^[4] all the attention when it comes to

the anti-vaxx movement, but the epidemic of non-medical exemptions exists in other states too, and in many cases it's worse. In fact according to data from 2012 ^[5], California isn't even in the top ten. One state that is, Maine, currently boasts a non-medical exemption rate for kindergarteners that is twice that of California. It's these data that has driven a Maine physician to speak out in an excellent read over at [The Guardian](#) ^[6].

[Dr. Amy Belisle](#) ^[7], a Maine pediatrician with 15 years experience, explains in her article that she is fed up with the heartbreak that has come from watching too many children die of vaccine-preventable diseases like chickenpox and pertussis. She discusses that in Maine the situation is dire: almost 40 schools in Maine have measles vaccination rates under 80% and at least one school has a measles vaccination rate of just 37 percent.

She then goes on to discuss the detrimental effects that the anti-vaxx movement has caused, in particular, she explains the effects on working parents and single mothers: I have limited paid time off to care for our kids when they are sick, and I rely on other children in our daycare and schools to be vaccinated to ensure that the kids in our community are healthy.

She continues later: Other people's unvaccinated kids don't just put my kids at risk for illness; they put many women in Maine and across the country in the economically precarious position of having sick children and, in some cases, no way to care for them without losing out on income.

She uses this to transition into a more economically based discussion about the benefits of immunizations. The Maine Primary Care Association estimates that for every dollar the state spends on vaccines, patients and communities save almost \$25 in combined direct and indirect

medical costs. Further proof that vaccines represent are a tremendous high value care. She also notes the interesting relationship that the poorest county in Maine has the highest vaccination rate.

She concludes the article with a positive spin, pointing out some of the strides she and her organization, [Child Health Quality Improvement](#) [8] at Maine Quality Counts of which she is the director of, have made in increasing vaccination rates. The program works with participating practices to reach out to patients who have missed or are in danger of missing scheduled vaccines while also educating patients and families on the benefits of vaccines. In just the last 26 months, the exemplary work of Dr. Belisle and her staff have increased immunization rates by 11 percent in participating medical practices, which translates to 6,000 kids being vaccinated who otherwise would not have.

The tireless efforts of Dr. Belisle and her staff notwithstanding, the data in Maine is particularly upsetting because the state offers vaccines free of charge through the Universal Vaccine Coverage Law which was passed 5 years ago.

Which means, as Dr. Belisle points out, the *only* obstacle to vaccines is: misinformation and the fear that it breeds.

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[1] <http://acsh.org/2015/04/california-vaccine-bill-progresses-through-another-committee/>

[2] <http://acsh.org/2015/04/bill-to-strengthen-vaccination-rates-in-california-stalls/>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2015/04/california-pro-vaccination-bill-approved-in-first-committee/>

[4] <http://acsh.org/2015/02/vaccines-hippocrates-idiots-finally-common-sense-california/>

[5] <http://www.pressherald.com/interactive/u-s-maine-2012-vaccination-rates/>

[6] <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/04/children-die-vaccine-preventable-diseases-we-can-stop-that>

[7] <http://themainemag.com/radio/radio-guests/dr-amy-belisle/>

[8] <http://www.mainequalitycounts.org/page/2-653/quality-counts-for-kids>