



DATE: June 11, 2014

TO: Washington State Board of Health Members

FROM: Thomas W. Pendergrass, MD MSPH

SUBJECT: PROJECT BRIEFING: CREATING A STANDARD FOR AN EMERGENCY PROCESS FOR RESPONDING TO EXPANDING VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASE OUTBREAKS AND EPIDEMICS IN WASHINGTON STATE

Background and Summary:

The Washington State Board of Health has the authority under RCW 43.20.050 to adopt rules requiring adults working with vulnerable populations to be vaccinated against infectious diseases in the case of an outbreak or epidemic. However, this authority must be implemented reasonably and carefully in order to avoid violating individual constitutional rights.

Not all Washington state residents are fully immunized against vaccine preventable diseases. There are many reasons for this. Some children are too young to have received their full series of vaccinations. Some people cannot be immunized for medical reasons. Some people are not immunizing themselves or their children for philosophical, personal or religious reasons. For example, over three percent of parents of kindergarteners file an immunization exemption for their children based on philosophical, personal or religious beliefs.

Because of age, medical condition, personal exemptions, and incomplete or waning immunity after vaccination, a large number of people in Washington state remain vulnerable to acquiring vaccine preventable diseases. So when a statewide vaccine preventable disease outbreak is expanding toward an epidemic, there is a real threat of injury or death to a large number of unprotected, vulnerable citizens in our State.

Washington needs to establish a process for acting quickly when a vaccine preventable disease outbreak or epidemic moves from local danger to become an eminent statewide threat. In order to best insure an effective statewide response, a standard approach is critical for implementing emergency processes to respond to vaccine preventable disease threats that are expanding from local health jurisdictions.

The project proposal in your briefing packets describes how the Board can provide leadership in developing a standard approach for activating an emergency process in the setting of expanding vaccine preventable disease outbreaks and epidemics. I intend to describe the project in greater detail and the proposed next steps so that the Board may choose to consider or modify the following motion.

Recommended Board Action:

The Board approves the plan for the project which will create a standard for an emergency process for responding to expanding vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks and epidemics in Washington State and requests implementation of the plan.

Staff Contact:

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