

Schools warn kids need shot by the fall

Parents urged to get children immunized as soon as possible

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With schools starting to close for summer break, many Santa Clara County schoolchildren are still ineligible to come back in the fall.

By then, all California schoolchildren entering grades 7 to 12 will need to show proof that they've received the Tdap booster shot to protect against whooping cough, also called pertussis. And with schools receiving nowhere close to 100 percent of their students' immunization records, nurses are urging parents to take action before schools close.

"We're just struggling. We're at about 50 percent, but the kids are leaving for summer," said Melinda Landau, a registered nurse and manager for health and

INSIDE

For a breakdown of whooping cough cases by county, see **Page 5**.

family support programs at the San Jose Unified School District. The district has been sending out letters and making automated phone calls to parents every other week, which has been bringing in 450 to 600 parents each time, she said. "But we still have 7,400 kids we have to get records for," Landau said. "We're just plugging away."

Districts across the South Bay are struggling to get parents to comply with the new law. "Numbers are coming up slowly, but it's probably still somewhere around 30 percent," said Eileen Obata, lead nurse at the Gilroy Unified School District. "That still leaves 2,000 kids."

The numbers are a little better in Santa Clara Unified's schools, with some schools having proof of immunization from as many as 75 percent of their students. But "we're

Whooping

Continued from Page 1

getting nervous,” said Carolyn Riley, health specialist for the Santa Clara Unified School District. “Over the summer, it gets a lot harder for us.”

Last year’s whooping cough epidemic is partly responsible for the new law. In 2010, California saw more than 9,000 cases of whooping cough, the most in over 60 years. Disease levels are still high this year heading into summer and fall, when the disease usually peaks.

While parents can now bring immunization records to their schools, once summer break begins they’ll have to send them to the school district offices in many districts. Landau urged parents to avoid sending the immunization records directly to San Jose Unified schools during the summer. “Once we shut down, I’d hate for it to be stuck in the mail.”

Districts plan to adopt stronger

WHOOPIING COUGH CASES

	2010	2011 (as of 5-16-2011)
	Cases (Rate per 100,000)	Cases (Rate per 100,000)
California	9,120 (23.3)	1,102 (7.5)
Alameda	422 (29.25)	64 (11.78)
Contra Costa	206 (19.15)	72 (17.66)
San Mateo	189 (25.66)	27 (9.77)
Santa Clara	473 (25.74)	136 (19.65)
Santa Cruz	87 (32.46)	6 (5.95)

measures to motivate parents over the summer. San Jose Unified won’t allow children to take part in sports practices after July 1 until the district has proof that they’ve received the Tdap booster. And all school districts plan to withhold class schedules until parents bring in the immunization records.

If parents choose not to immunize their children for medical or personal beliefs, they still must go to their districts to sign waivers, Landau said.

She said the district was also looking into the possibility of hav-

ing some clinics during orientation, with nurses providing immunizations and checking records at the same time that schedules were being handed out. “But we sure don’t want people to wait till then.”

One advantage of going in to the schools before summer break is that a lot of children have actually received their immunizations already, even if parents don’t know it. Parents often don’t read their immunization cards correctly, Obata said. “If parents just bring their immunization cards to school, we can look them over before school’s out,”

saving parents the trouble of going to their doctor, she said.

“If parents wait till the summer, a lot of doctors are already booked,” said Landau. If they can’t get an appointment with their doctor, there are several other options, including community clinics as well as pharmacies at Rite Aid, Walgreens, CVS and Safeway. The county public health department also runs an immunization clinic for those who are uninsured or underinsured.

Several school district health staff members are planning to come in early in August to determine which students haven’t turned in their immunization records and try to get those, Obata said. For now, the focus is on making sure all students get to attend the first day, said Marla Olszewski, Campbell Union School District health nurse. “There’s so much that happens in those first few days, the last thing we want is to have a sizable number of students in limbo,” she said. “We’re not looking forward to that, and we’re doing everything we can

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manager for San Jose Unified

to inspire parents to get it done.”

“A lot of people think we’re just kidding, that we won’t exclude their kids,” Landau said. But if they don’t submit their records by fall, “they’ll have to come pick up their kids from school because they were excluded.”

*For more information, go to
www.shotsforschool.org.*