

California governor signs strict school vaccine legislation (Update)

June 30 2015, by Julia Horowitz



Otto Coleman, 6, waits outside the Governor's office with his brother Fenton, 4, left, and father Joshua, to deliver a stack of petitions with thousands of signatures calling on California Gov. Jerry Brown to veto a measure requiring nearly all California school children to be vaccinated Monday, June 29, 2015, in Sacramento, Calif. The state Senate approved the bill sending it to Brown. Joshua Coleman said his son has been wheelchair bound as a result of an adverse reaction to a vaccine. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

Gov. Jerry Brown wasted no time Tuesday in signing a contentious California bill to impose one of the strictest school vaccination laws in the country following an outbreak of measles at Disneyland late last year.

Brown, a Democrat, issued a signing statement just one day after lawmakers sent him the bill to strike California's personal belief exemption for immunizations, a move that requires nearly all public schoolchildren to be vaccinated. The bill takes effect next year.

"The science is clear that vaccines dramatically protect children against a number of infectious and dangerous diseases," Brown wrote. "While it's true that no medical intervention is without risk, the evidence shows that immunization powerfully benefits and protects the community."

California joins Mississippi and West Virginia as the only states with such strict requirements.

Democratic Sens. Richard Pan of Sacramento and Ben Allen of Santa Monica introduced the measure after the outbreak at the theme park in December infected over 100 people in the U.S. and Mexico.

The bill likely would be successful in increasing immunization rates and stopping the spread of disease, pediatric doctors said Monday after the state Senate sent the legislation to the governor.

Bill supporters, including doctors, hospital representatives and health advocates, celebrated at an elementary school Tuesday. Lawmakers held babies, declaring the public would be better protected as a result of the bill.

"The science is clear," Pan said. "Californians have spoken. The governor and the Legislature have spoken. No more preventable contagions. No more outbreaks. No more hospitalizations. No more

deaths. And no more fear."



Debra Baretta, an opponent of a measure requiring nearly all California school children to be vaccinated, wipes her eyes after learning that California Gov. Jerry Brown signed the bill into law Tuesday, June 30, 2015, in Sacramento, Calif. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

Opponents of the requirement have vowed to pursue legal options to block the mandate.

Kimberly McCauley, a Sacramento resident with a 23-month-old daughter, was among a small group of parents holding vigil at the Capitol when they learned of Brown's signing Tuesday morning.

McCauley's eyes filled with tears.

"She will go to school. And then, when she is denied at kindergarten, I will sue," she said.

Allen said he is confident the new law would withstand a legal challenge.

"Similar laws have passed muster over and over again in other states," he said.

Medical exemptions would still be granted to children with serious health issues. Children whose parents refuse vaccination can try to obtain a medical exemption or be homeschooled. The measure applies to public and private schools, as well as day care facilities.



State Sen. Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, second from left, and Sen. Ben Allen, D-Santa Monica, right, smile after their measure requiring nearly all California school children to be vaccinated, was approved by the Senate, Monday, June 29, 2015, at the Capitol in Sacramento. The bill will go to the governor. Also seen are Sen. William Monning, D-Carmel, left, and Sen. Marty Block, D-San Diego, third from left. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

The bill has seen heated opposition from parents who have come by the thousands to protest at the Capitol in recent weeks. The topic has drawn such acidic debate that the authors received threats and were placed under extra security.

A recall effort was even launched against at least two lawmakers who supported the proposal.

Opponents assert that the state is eliminating informed consent and

trampling on parental rights. Similar legislation was dropped in Oregon earlier this year because opposition was so fierce.

Despite fervent pushback, the bill passed with bipartisan support.



State Sen. Joel Anderson, R-Alpine, urges lawmakers to reject a measure requiring nearly all California school children to be vaccinated, during the Senate session at the Capitol, Monday, June 29, 2015, in Sacramento, Calif. The bill co-authored by Sen. Ben Allen, D-Santa Monica, and Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, was approved by the Senate and will go to the governor. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

Brown on Tuesday credited both supporters and opponents with "expressing their positions with eloquence and sincerity."

He said after considerable debate, the Legislature explicitly provided an exception that makes it easier to obtain medical exemptions. SB277 was amended to allow doctors to use a family's medical history as an evaluating factor.

The authors also agreed to establish a grandfather clause, allowing students who currently claim a personal belief exemption to maintain it until their next vaccine checkpoint. Checkpoints occur in kindergarten and seventh grade.



State Sen. Ben Allen, D-Santa Monica, right and Sen. Richard Pan, D-

Sacramento, talk with the media after their measure requiring nearly all California school children to be vaccinated, was approved by the state Senate Monday, June 29, 2015, in Sacramento, Calif. The bill will go to the governor. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

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