

Massachusetts shells out nearly \$400,000 for vaccine record checks in state-run shelters

May 27 2024, by Chris Van Buskirk, Boston Herald



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State officials have pumped nearly \$400,000 into a program to review the vaccine records of families entering the emergency shelter system, including migrants from other countries who may have foreign

documentation, according to the Healey administration.

Officials at Boston-based John Snow, Inc., which has long worked with the state, have been contracted to review immunization documents. Since January, more than 1,200 children in state-run shelters have had their records checked, according to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, or HHS.

Vaccine record checks have occurred since September 2023 but the cost surfaced in a biweekly report on the shelter system released Monday, which said \$381,000 has been shuttled to the program.

Concerns about families' vaccination status were most recently aired at a local meeting in Norfolk where residents heatedly debated Gov. Maura Healey's decision to designate a former prison in the town as an overflow shelter for up to 450 people.

Many families entering shelters arrive with vaccine documentation received in other countries, according to the HHS.

Staff with John Snow, Inc. review the records families have with them and enter the information into a state database so clinicians can plan for and provide children with the vaccines they need, according to the state.

A spokesperson for John Snow, Inc. did not provide a comment in response to a Boston Herald inquiry.

The Department of Public Health has run "catch-up vaccination clinics" through the winter and spring for families to receive vaccinations. State officials have handed out more than 4,000 vaccinations at the clinics since January, according to the state.

Massachusetts requires children and students to have various

vaccinations before entering school.

An HHS spokesperson said compliance with school immunization requirements is a "priority" but vaccine record reviews and catch-up shots include all shots recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

The disclosure of the dollars spent on vaccine record reviews offer yet another look at the hundreds of millions the Healey administration is spending on shelters that house [local residents](#) and migrants.

Spending this fiscal year is up to \$591 million, with \$107.5 million used to pay shelter providers, \$20.5 million shuttled to clinical assessment sites, \$8.9 million on emergency per-pupil student aid, \$6.2 million to cover National Guard deployments to shelters, and \$1.2 million for municipal reimbursements, according to the report.

Healey's budget writing office still expects to spend \$932 million this fiscal year and \$915 million in the next on the shelter system, according to a spokesperson for the Executive Office of Administration and Finance.

The Healey administration has received a total of \$826 million this [fiscal year](#) from the Legislature to pay for the emergency shelter system and the governor appears poised to receive at least \$500 million in the next based on yearly budgets the House and Senate have produced.

The state reported 7,431 families were enrolled in the emergency shelter system as of May 23, according to a dashboard that was once updated daily but is now refreshed on a weekly basis.

About half of the families, or 3,731, entered the shelter system as migrants, refugees, or [asylum seekers](#) as of May 16, according to the

report released Monday. Another 514 families applied for shelter and 338 were in overflow sites in the two weeks preceding May 16, the report said.

Another 778 families were on the wait list for shelter placement as of May 16 , according to the report.

Provided by Boston Herald

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