

Health and Welfare proposes new vaccine opt-out form

BOISE — The director of the Department of Health and Welfare on Thursday unveiled a new and shorter vaccine opt-out form Thursday.

While Dick Armstrong was trying to address the concerns of vaccination skeptics with the new proposal, some had a similar problem with the new form as with the old one — the parent would have to sign next to the statement “I am aware that my child may contract a vaccine-preventable disease,” which can be taken as promoting vaccination.

Sara Walton Brady told the Senate Health and Welfare Committee she would still have problems with signing the new form.

“I am not anti-vax, I am pro-choice,” Brady said. “I think everyone should be able to make the choices for their children that best fit them.”

The committee has been gathering information in advance of a full hearing and expected vote on a bill proposed by Health Freedom Idaho that would let parents opt out vaccinating their children with a simple letter rather than having to fill out the form DHW provides to school districts.

While the current law doesn't specify any kind of opt-out form parents have to use, school districts use the one DHW provides, and supporters of keeping it or a similar standardized form say it helps both to inform parents and to keep a record of which vaccines a child does or doesn't have.

“I'm not sure why there is so much uncooperation at this point,” Armstrong said. “It seems real straightforward. We're trying to protect everyone's rights and we're trying to protect children against communicable diseases.”

Thursday, the committee heard a presentation from Armstrong on the new form — which is only a proposal at this point — and also one from Leslie Manookian, who co-wrote and produced the anti-vaccination documentary “The Greater Good.” Then, they heard testimony from a mix of vaccination and opt-out form supporters and opponents.

The committee discussion wasn't the only vaccine-related news out of the Legislature Thursday. Earlier in the day the House voted 26-44 to kill a bill that would have required providers to enter into the Idaho Immunization Reminder Information System when people are vaccinated.

The point of that bill was to keep a record of the vaccines patients have gotten so they don't accidentally get multiple doses of the same vaccination. People still would have been able to opt out. However, opponents cited numerous concerns, with one that came up frequently being worries about the expansion of government and the state collecting that much personal data. Both Democrats and Republicans debated for and against; out of the

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Magic Valley delegation, Reps. Lance Clow and Stephen Hartgen, both R-Twin Falls, voted with the majority to kill the bill while the rest voted for it.

While much of the testimony at Thursday's committee meeting was about vaccines themselves, at the end of the meeting Sen. Kelly Anthon, R-Rupert, said the real issue is the form:

“Everything I read in the law says the Department of Health and Welfare overstepped. Period.”

Anthon said he has problems with the form asking people things such as the reason for their religious or philosophical exemption, saying this has nothing to do with gathering the kind of statistical information DHW needs.

“Why would you have to justify yourself to the State of Idaho when you have the legal right under law not to vaccinate your children?”

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