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School Vaccination Rates Vary across California

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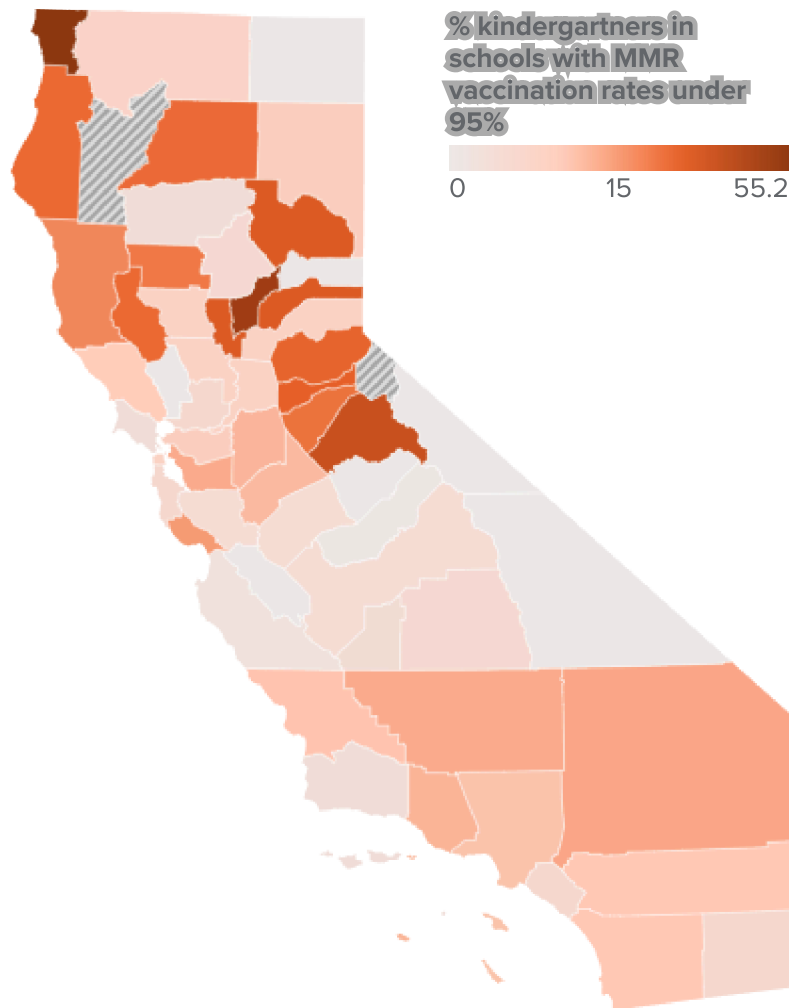
Recent outbreaks of measles in Texas and other states have heightened concern about vaccination rates among children. According to the CDC, there have been 800 confirmed measles cases in the US as of April 2025, including 9 in California. Most of the confirmed cases nationwide are among children (70%); nearly all of these children (96%) were likely unvaccinated. California has high childhood vaccination rates, but rates are lower in some parts of the state.

The measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is highly effective; the US categorized these diseases as “eliminated” in 2000, largely as a result of vaccination programs. All states require the MMR vaccine for kindergarten, though most offer exemptions for religious and personal beliefs. California is one of only five states that does not allow nonmedical exemptions. Additionally, California lawmakers have strengthened vaccination requirements for schools over the past several years and limited the number of ways families can request exemptions (Senate Bills 276, 277, and 714).

This is reflected in the state’s overall vaccination rates, which are among the highest in the nation. In the 2023–24 school year (the most recent school-level data available), about 93.7% of California’s kindergarten students received all required vaccines, a slight decline from 94.1% in 2022–23. Rates are even higher for some individual vaccines, including MMR: over 96% of kindergartners are vaccinated for MMR, putting the state average above the commonly cited herd immunity threshold of 95%. The national average for MMR vaccination dropped to 92.7% in 2023–24.

Still, vaccination rates among kindergartners vary across the state. Fourteen of California’s 58 counties reported overall immunization rates below 90%. Sixteen counties reported rates under 95% for the MMR vaccine, including five northern counties with MMR rates lower than 90%. These 16 counties are potentially vulnerable to outbreaks.

Shares of kindergartners in schools with low MMR vaccine rates vary across the state



SOURCE: California Department of Public Health.

NOTES: Data is not available for schools with less than 20 students. The percentage of kindergartners in schools with 20+ students in counties included in the data ranges from 82.7% to 99.6%. Diagonal lines indicate counties (Trinity and Alpine) with few kindergartners in schools with more than 20 students, which are not included. Most counties with 0% also have very few kindergarten students.

FROM: DDIC Brief, April 2025

Public schools are required to provide information on their students' vaccination statuses; schools that admit more than 10% of kindergartners who do not meet vaccination requirements undergo compliance audits and are at risk of losing state funding. In 2024–25, more than 350 elementary schools statewide admitted more than 10% of their kindergartners conditionally because their families had not submitted required vaccination records; this was down from 450 in 2022–23.

Audited schools in 2024–25 had higher shares of low-income students, with 75% receiving free or reduced price lunch, compared to about 60% in non-audited schools. In urban areas, shares of audited and unaudited schools were similar. Schools in suburban locations had lower shares of audited schools, while the share of rural schools that were audited (28%) was much higher than the share of non-audited rural schools (12%).

California schools audited for low vaccination rates have higher shares of low-income students and are more likely to be rural

	Non-Audited Schools	Audited Schools
Low Income	60.3%	74.8%
City	41.7%	38.7%
Rural	11.9%	27.8%
Suburban	39.6%	25.5%
Town	6.8%	8.0%

SOURCE: California Department of Public Health.

NOTES: Only elementary schools are included. Low income refers to the average free or reduced-price meals (FRPM) enrollment in schools and is weighted by total school enrollment. Shares for locale are based on school counts within each category (city, rural, suburban, and town), following National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) classifications. The 10% of elementary schools (650) with missing NCES locale data were imputed based on their district locale type (NCES assigns locale type to school districts based on enrollment-weighted locale assignments of schools within the district).

FROM: PPIC Blog, April 2025.

State vaccination requirements for schools are driven by the well-established public health benefits of vaccines. School-located vaccination events and mobile clinics are key to ensuring that children get the required vaccines. Increasingly targeted and evidence-based interventions to address vaccine hesitancy are also important; these interventions require collaboration between local health jurisdictions, districts, and individual schools.

An earlier version of this post was published on [October 10, 2023](#).

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