

Immunization Status of School Children in Michigan, 2021

Key Points

- To protect children and their peers from outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases at school, Michigan students must receive a minimum of [6 different immunizations](#), unless they receive a medical, religious, or philosophical waiver. In 2014, Michigan added an education requirement to the waiver process.
- Following the educational requirement, Michigan's overall waiver rates dropped by more than a third (from 4.8% in 2014 to 3.1% in 2015). For the next 5 years, waiver rates fluctuated between 3-4%, but that ended in 2021 when waiver rates increased to 4.2%.
- In 2021, immunization waiver rates increased in all grades with reporting requirements:
 - Kindergarten: 4.6% compared to 3.7% in 2020
 - Seventh grade: 3.9% compared to 3.2% in 2020
 - New entrants to a school district: 4.1% compared to 3.2% in 2020
 - Overall (kindergarten, 7th grade and new entrants combined): 4.2% compared to 3.4%
- This increase in waivers occurred amidst an overall decline in childhood immunizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This leaves many children susceptible to disease.

History of Immunization Waivers in Michigan

Routine childhood immunizations offer safe and effective protection against 14 different serious, even life-threatening diseases. To prevent outbreaks in schools and other places where children congregate, a high percentage of children must be immunized. States meet this need through a variety of different school requirements.

Over time, Michigan has implemented laws and rules to ensure that children are adequately immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases:

- 1978: each student, upon entry to kindergarten or a new school district involving grades 1-12, possess a certificate of immunization at registration or not later than the first day of school.
- 2000: *Public Act 89* mandated an immunization assessment for each sixth-grade student.
- 2010: additional immunizations were added to the list of requirements.
- 2012: Senate Bills 237, 238, and 239 moved the sixth-grade assessment to seventh grade.
- 2014: new educational requirement for Michigan parents opting their children out of getting vaccinated before entering school

Current Immunization Requirements in Michigan Schools

Prior to a child entering or attending school, parents or guardians are required to produce documentation confirming that the child has received all doses of the [school-required immunizations](#), or has received at least one dose of each required immunization and is currently waiting to receive subsequent doses after the appropriate interval. (In the following tables these children are considered "complete.") A required vaccine may be waived or delayed if:

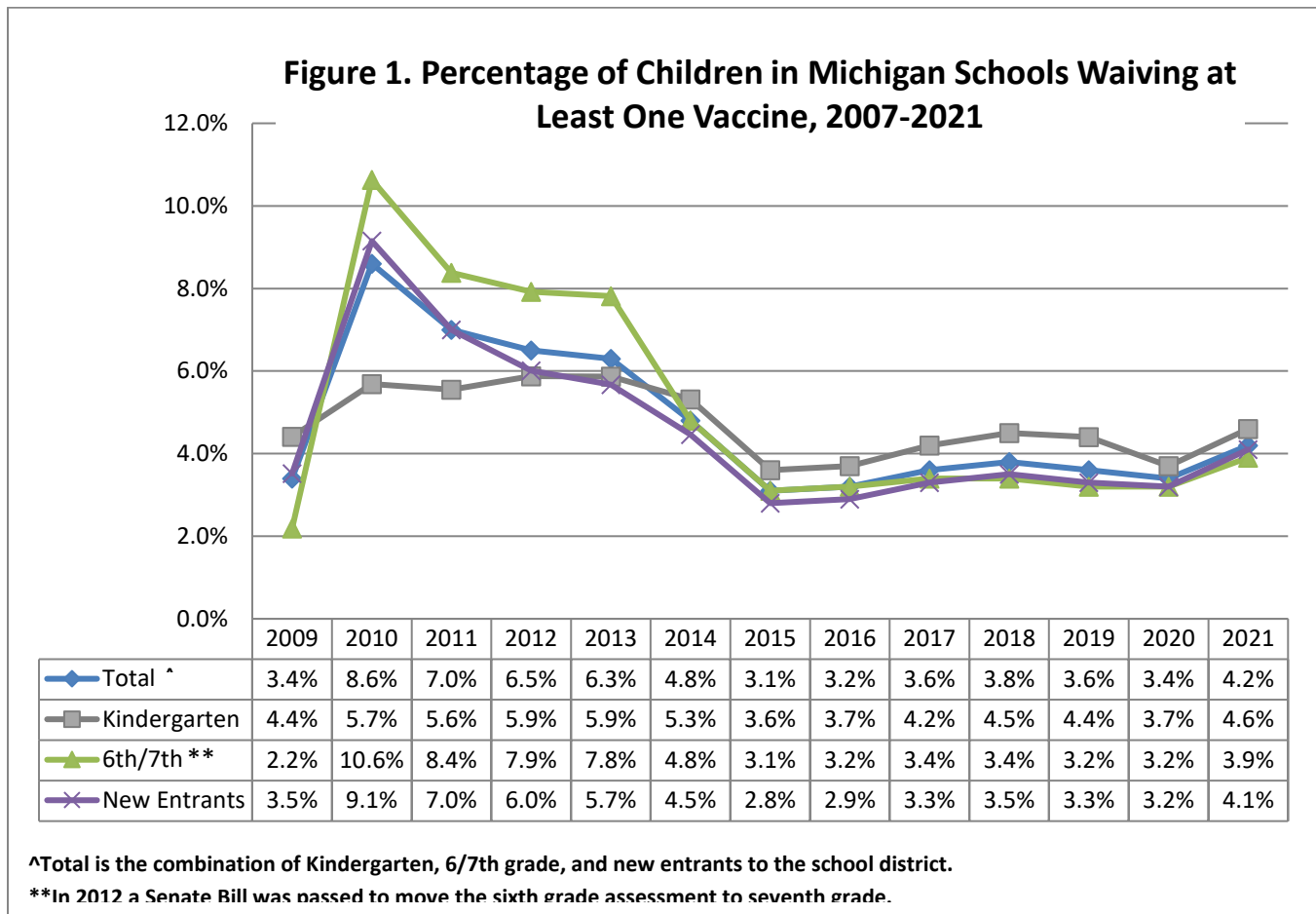
- 1) A valid medical contraindication precludes the child from receiving the vaccine. A medical waiver must be completed and signed by the child's physician and shall state the contraindication(s), the vaccine(s) involved, and the time period the child is precluded from receiving the vaccine(s).

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- 2) The parent or guardian holds religious or philosophical beliefs that preclude receipt of a vaccine(s). Any parent/guardian wishing to claim a nonmedical waiver must receive education on the benefits of vaccination and the risks of disease from a local health department (LHD) before obtaining the certified nonmedical waiver form from the LHD. An updated waiver must be presented each time the child's immunization status is reported (additional information available [here](#)).

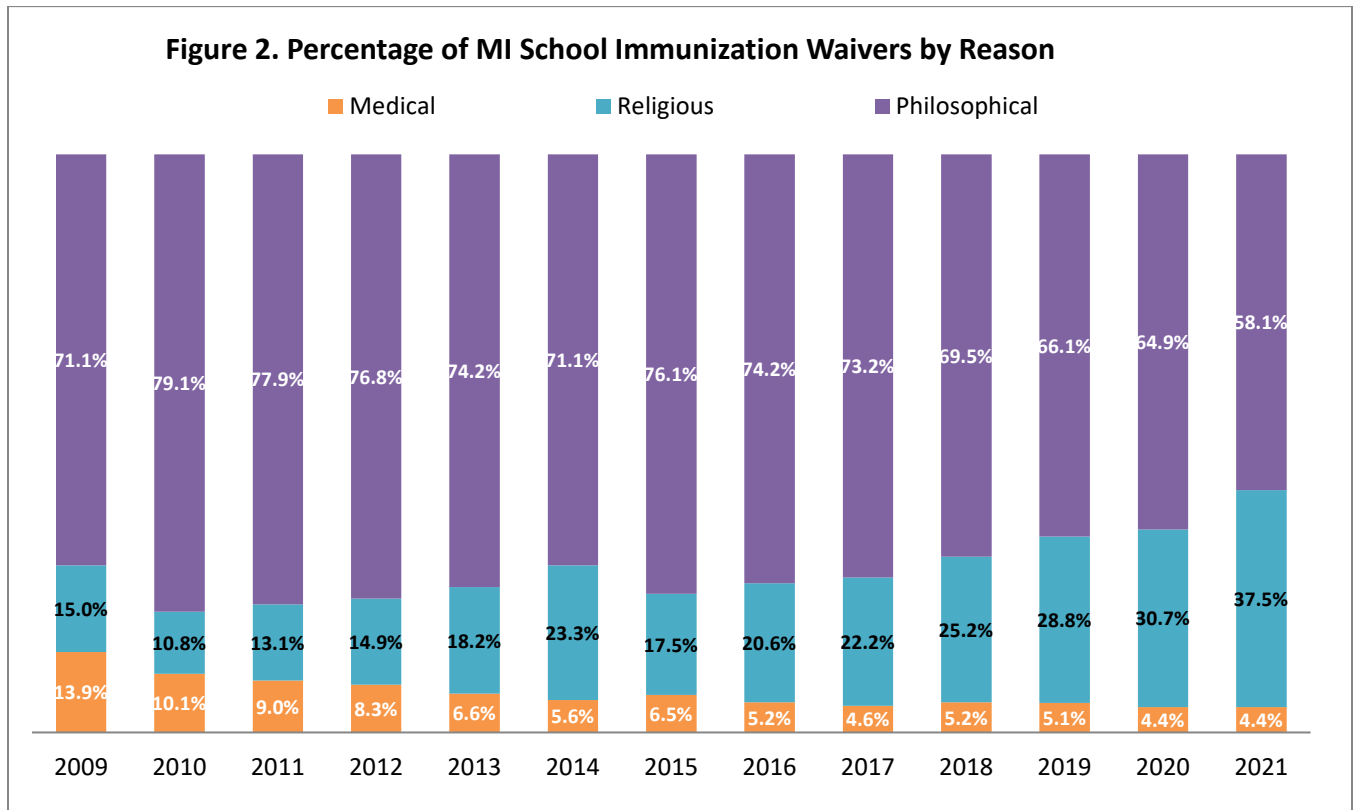
Michigan's Waiver Rates over time

Each year, schools are required to report the immunization status of kindergarteners, 7th graders (6th graders prior to 2012), and new entrants to the school district. The higher a school's waiver rate, the fewer children have gotten all required vaccines. Michigan's overall waiver rate has ranged from a high of 8.6% in 2010, when additional vaccine requirements were added, to a low of 3.1% in 2015, following implementation of the education requirement, (see Figure 1).



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In 2021, overall waiver rates rose above 4% for the first time in 7 years, with more than 16,000 out of approximately 384,500 surveyed students opting out of at least one required vaccine. As seen in figure 2, the vast majority of these waivers are for nonmedical reasons. Philosophical waivers accounted for more than half (58.7%) of all waivers in 2021, and the share of religious waivers rose to 37.5% of all waivers in 2021.



Immunization Status at Public vs. Private Schools, 2021

In 2021, public schools had higher immunization completion rates (92.7%) compared to private schools (87.0%) and lower waiver rates (3.8% compared to 7.9%). This can be seen in Table 1, which compares how many children at public versus private schools were considered “complete” (i.e., completed all required immunizations or had received at least 1 dose of all required immunizations and were waiting to receive additional doses), as well as how many children had each type of waiver.

Table 2 further breaks down these numbers by grade level. Similar trends hold within each grade level, with public-school kindergarteners, 7th-graders, and new entrants all having higher completion rates and lower waiver rates than their private-school peers. (Note that percent complete plus percent waived does not always equal 100% because some students may still have incomplete/pending documentation at the time of reporting.)

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Even more granular data is available by school building on the [MDHHS website](#). (Note that schools with Kindergarten/7th/New enrollments < 5 are suppressed to protect privacy.)

Table 1. Immunization status of Michigan students at public vs. private schools, 2021

	Public	Private	Total
Number of reporting schools	3,199	708	3,906
Total students	351,146	33,316	384,462
No. students complete	325,576	28,989	354,565
% complete	92.7%	87.0%	92.2%
No. students with waiver	13,389	2,621	16,010
% waived	3.8%	7.9%	4.2%
Medical waivers	610	92	702
% medical	4.6%	3.5%	4.4%
Religious waivers	4,902	1,103	6,005
% religious	36.6%	42.1%	37.5%
Philosophical waivers	7,877	1,426	9,303
% philosophical	58.8%	54.4%	58.1%

Table 2. Immunization status of Michigan Kindergarteners, 7th graders and new entrants at public vs. private schools, 2021

	Kindergarten			Seventh Grade			New Entrants		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
No. schools	1,641	539	2,179	1,135	501	1,636	3,169	643	3,811
Total students	103,966	10,456	114,422	98,352	7,411	105,763	148,828	15,449	164,277
complete	95,992	9,084	105,076	90,700	6,349	97,049	138,884	13,556	152,440
% complete	92.3%	86.9%	91.8%	92.2%	85.7%	91.8%	93.3%	87.7%	92.8%
waiver	4,284	950	5,234	3,588	499	4,087	5,517	1,172	6,689
% waived	4.1%	9.1%	4.6%	3.6%	6.7%	3.9%	3.7%	7.6%	4.1%
Medical	236	32	268	129	25	154	245	35	280
% med.	5.5%	3.4%	5.1%	3.6%	5.0%	3.8%	4.4%	3.0%	4.2%
Religious	1,501	393	1,894	1,285	210	1,495	2,116	500	2,616
% rel.	35.0%	41.4%	36.2%	35.8%	42.1%	36.6%	38.4%	42.7%	39.1%
Philosophical	2,547	525	3,072	2,174	264	2,438	3,156	637	3,793
% phil.	59.5%	55.3%	58.7%	60.6%	52.9%	59.7%	57.2%	54.4%	56.7%