

BOX 8.6 Vaccine Laws

In the summer of 2015, Governor Jerry Brown of California signed one of the strictest school child vaccination laws in the country, eliminating personal and religious belief exemptions.⁹⁷ Children who are not vaccinated will not be permitted to attend public or private schools; homeschooling will be their only option.

“The science is clear that vaccines dramatically protect children against a number of infectious and dangerous diseases,” Brown said in a signing statement. “While it’s true that no medical intervention is without risk, the evidence shows that immunization powerfully benefits and protects the community.”

The bill’s author, Richard Pan, said, “The courts have been very clear that you don’t have a right to spread a communicable disease, that there’s a public interest in keeping our communities safe from disease.”

The bill’s passage has enhanced vaccination rates, but there will be some parents who are so anxious that they will remove their children from public schools and the public health system rather than vaccinate. This is not a goal the medical community wants to achieve.

A less authoritarian approach was adopted in Michigan. There, waivers are still allowed, but parents must go to the public health department and sit through a 30-minute education program. Preliminary results indicate a 30% reduction in waiver rates as compared to programs where no education was required.¹⁵