

Law changes immunization requirements

By REBECCA NESBIT
Staff Writer

More than 200 Orange County elementary school students are back in the classrooms after they were asked last month to stay at home until they complied with the new state immunization law.

The General Assembly amended the law this summer to increase the number of shots kindergarten and first-grade students must have, said Susan Spalt, home health coordinator for Chapel Hill-Carrboro city schools. The new law also tightened the timetable for students to get their shots.

The law drastically increased the number of local elementary students not in compliance. This year 221 students failed to comply, compared to only 10 students last year, said Judy Butler, the acting school health coordinator of the county health department.

"We're just trying to provide protection against communicable diseases," Butler said. "All of the requirements in the new law now have always been recommended. It's good now that they're required."

The law also includes a provision that would fine school principals \$500 per day for each unimmunized child after school had been in session 30 days, which was Sept. 25 for local schools.

By Sept. 28, all but 76 students came to school immunized or with immunization records. Those not in compliance were asked to leave school until they had received the new state-required shots or found records of these shots.

The new law requires five rounds of immunization shots, instead of three, for diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus (DPTs); four oral polio vaccines, instead of three; one shot for measles, mumps and rubella.

"All states have immunization laws, but North Carolina is one of the stricter ones, and we're proud of that because we have reasonably lower rates than many of the states," Butler said.

The majority of the students in violation of immunization laws were in kindergarten or first grade, and many of them were excluded from school because they lacked one of the boosters required after the age of four, Butler said.

Local schools also asked many transfer students to leave classes because their former schools did not send immunization records. Spalt said.

The schools made efforts to inform parents of the new law, she said. The health department sent two letters to the parents of children with inadequate records, followed by one phone call. If the parent was not reached, a third letter was sent.

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Psychologist describes methods to alleviate stress

By CHARLA PRICE
Staff Writer

For some students, stress piles up along with exams and papers.

Keeping that potentially harmful stress to a minimum is often a difficult task, but Chapel Hill psychologist Shirley Sanders says it's not impossible.

When a person has high expectations about something, stress often results from fear of not achieving those expectations, said Sanders, who used to work at UNC's Student Health Service.

Students become preoccupied with "I just can't get it done," and this interferes with their ability to concentrate, Sanders said.

"Students have so much static in their system from looking back at what they haven't done, and looking ahead at all they have to do, that they cannot concentrate on what they need to get done," she said.

Sanders said students think learning is supposed to be hard, that they "really have to sweat to make good grades." This feeling

only increases stress and interferes with the learning process.

She emphasized that although there is no substitute for studying, it can be done in an environment with less pressure.

"Students need to relax and not prejudge what they need to do, so they can study and maintain and retrieve information," Sanders said.

Often this stress leads to anxiety attacks. Sanders said this physical feeling of stress is the body reacting as if failure has already

occurred.

According to Sanders, a good way to deal with stress is to reverse the tension. Taking time to relax the mind and the body allows students to study more effectively.

"Methods such as progressive relaxation and meditation can help the mind relax and focus better," she said.

Sanders said most students tend to feel a certain amount of pressure during midterm exams, and that even students who appear to be relaxed may be experiencing the

same feelings.

"Appearances can be deceiving," she said. "It is important that students recognize that they are not alone in their feelings of stress and that something can be done to alleviate these feelings."

Studying in groups to create positive reinforcement is helpful, especially before exams, she said. Talking through feelings of anxiety can help, too.

When such methods are not effective and students can't relax, counseling is in order, she said.

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