

Response to 2025 Grand Jury Report

County Executive Office & County
Health Department

Do Vaccination Rates in Santa
Barbara County Create a Public
Health Risk?



Summary

- On May 29, 2025, the 2024-25 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury distributed a report titled “Do Vaccination Rates in Santa Barbara County Create a Public Health Risk?”
- The report focused on the lack of County vaccination rate data for homeschooled children and adult populations. It also suggested protective measures that the County can take for unvaccinated individuals in high-risk settings, such as the jail.
- The report lists five findings and recommendations.
 - All five findings and recommendations were addressed to the Board.
 - Finding and recommendation's 3 through 5 were additionally addressed to the Sheriff's Office.
- The Board of Supervisors is required to respond to the Grand Jury reports in writing within 90 days and is responsible for responding to findings and recommendations listed in the report.

Overview

- The County is committed to protecting the community from infectious disease threats and preparing for future outbreaks.
- The County acknowledges the shortfalls of current databases that do not accurately account for vaccinations of homeschooled children or vaccinations in adults.
- The Santa Barbara County Health Department (County Health) reports that robust data will be available in the future as new mandates in the State of California require all vaccinations to be entered into the California Immunization Registry (CAIR).
- County Health continues to use proxy measures such as trends, disease outbreaks, and other tools to assess community immunity and any associated risks.

Childhood Vaccination Data for Homeschooled Children and for Adults

Findings 1 and 2



Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1: *The lack of County-wide childhood vaccination data for homeschooled children means that County Health knowledge of community immunity levels is incomplete.*

Agree – Unlike children enrolled in school, homeschooled children are not mandated to report vaccine status and therefore vaccination rates in this population of children are unknown. This is consistent across California.

Recommendation 1: *The Grand Jury recommends that the County Board of Supervisors require County Health to study and estimate childhood vaccination levels of homeschooled children in the County. To be implemented by December 1, 2025.*

Will not be implemented – There is no feasible method to reliably study and estimate childhood vaccination levels of homeschooled children. In an effort to address the Grand Jury's recommendation, County Health reviewed the estimated number of homeschooled children and assumed they were all unvaccinated in order to represent a "worst case scenario." In such scenario, the overall vaccination rates for children between the ages of 5 to 17 dropped from 97% to 93%. Herd immunity targets range between 90 to 95%, thus even under this scenario, the County is still within the herd immunity target.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 2: *The lack of County-wide childhood vaccination data for adults means that County Health knowledge of community immunity levels is incomplete.*

Partially Disagree with an explanation – The Board agrees that currently there is no reliable database for countywide childhood vaccination data for adults. However, this does not mean that the knowledge of community immunity levels is incomplete. The California Immunization Registry (CAIR) began mandating data entry of all vaccines since January 2023, therefore as residents age into adulthood, childhood vaccine rates within adults will become available. Currently, County Health relies on data from reportable vaccine preventable diseases and outbreak trends to assess whether the community immunity is at risk.

Recommendation 2: *The Grand Jury recommends that the County Board of Supervisors require County Health to study and estimate childhood vaccination levels of adults in the County. To be implemented by December 1, 2025.*

Will not be Implemented – There is no reliable method to estimate childhood vaccination levels in adults. The only feasible method would be through a countywide survey where individuals are asked to provide or recollect their childhood immunization records. However, recollection is unreliable and insufficient to infer community immunity and it is unlikely that adults maintain their child immunization records.

Childhood Vaccination Rates for Incarcerated Persons and Protective Measures for Incarcerated Persons

Finding 3,4, and 5



Findings and Recommendations

Finding 3: *The Sheriff's Office has not determined childhood vaccination rates of inmates in County jails, potentially placing the inmates and staff at risk.*

Disagree partially – The Board agrees that the Sheriff's Office has not determined childhood vaccination rates of inmates in County Jails but disagrees that this places the inmates and staff at risk. Inmates are screened for communicable disease signs and symptoms upon intake, and County Disease Control staff provide assistance and recommendations to jail healthcare staff for disease surveillance and reporting.

Recommendation 3: *The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office collect data during health intake screenings at the County's jails to determine childhood vaccination rates. To be implemented by December 1, 2025.*

Will be Implemented – The Board agrees with this recommendation and County Health recommends that the intake process and initial health assessment at the County Jails include questions about childhood vaccination rates or indicators of being vaccinated, such as attending elementary school in California or serving in the military (both mandates for childhood vaccination). According to the Sheriff Office's response to the Grand Jury dated July 29, 2025, this recommendation will be implemented by December 1, 2025.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 4: *There is no program in place at the County's jails to provide childhood vaccinations to unvaccinated inmates, increasing risk for the inmates and staff.*

Disagree partially with an explanation – The Board agrees that there is no program to provide childhood vaccinations to inmates but disagrees that this places the inmates and staff at risk. As indicated in the response to Finding 3, inmates are screened on intake for communicable diseases. While it is impossible to eliminate all risk of disease transmission in jails especially from asymptomatic persons, the risk is substantially reduced through intake screening, active surveillance, prompt isolation of symptomatic persons, and quarantining for exposed patients as needed.

Recommendation 4: *The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office implement a program to administer required childhood vaccinations to unvaccinated inmates. To be implemented by December 1, 2025.*

Will be implemented – The Board supports offering catch-up vaccinations to unvaccinated incarcerated persons in accordance with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and based on identified risk factors. County Health is presently working with the contracted jail medical provider to implement a vaccination program in the jails consistent with the above guidelines. The Sheriff Office's July 29, 2025 response to the Grand Jury indicated that the Sheriff will be analyzing implementation of a vaccination program and will provide a written report of its analysis by December 1, 2025. Their analysis will be utilized to further refine implementation.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 5: *There is no procedure in place at the County's jails on when or how to isolate unvaccinated inmates, increasing potential risk of a disease outbreak in the jails.*

Disagree partially with an explanation – The Board agrees that there is not a specific procedure in place for isolating unvaccinated inmates, but disagrees that this increases a potential risk for disease outbreaks. The Sheriff's Office has established protocols for isolating inmates who exhibit signs and symptoms of infectious disease.

Recommendation 4: *The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office develop and enforce a procedure on when and how to isolate unvaccinated inmates. To be implemented by December 1, 2025.*

Will not be implemented – Isolating otherwise healthy individuals can negatively impact mental health and can increase the risk for suicide in incarcerated persons. The Sheriff's Office has established protocols for isolating inmates who exhibit signs and symptoms of infectious disease. Isolating incarcerated persons solely because they are unvaccinated would potentially violate these individuals' rights.

Recommended Actions

- a) Consider and adopt the responses in Attachment A as the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2024-25 Grand Jury report entitled "Do Vaccination Rates in Santa Barbara County Create a Public Health Risk?";
- b) Authorize the Chair to sign the letter included in Attachment A, and forward the letter and responses to the Presiding Judge of Santa Barbara County Superior Court; and
- c) Determine pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15378(b)(5) that the above actions are not a project subject to CEQA review, because they are government administrative activities that do not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment.



Questions?