

# Child immunizations drop

Health experts warn of disease outbreaks as vaccinations decline

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Schools in Walworth County have reported declining student immunization rates — down sharply in some cases — as parent skepticism grows amid an anti-vaccination movement that critics say is based on junk science.

County health officials are warning that immunization rates plummeting below 50 percent in

some schools could elevate the risk of outbreaks of measles and other dangerous childhood diseases.

But school administrators cite a growing popularity of anti-vaccination sentiments in Walworth County, along with state laws that allow parents to send un-immunized kids to school.

While state law requires students to be immunized against measles, chickenpox, whooping cough and other ailments, the law also permits parents to opt out for religious or other personal reasons.

At a parochial school in Mukwonago, in the northeastern

corner of Walworth County, the student immunization rate has dropped to 39 percent — the lowest of any school in the county this year.

Jonathan Roberts, principal of Mukwonago Baptist Academy, said many parents have embraced the anti-vaccination argument that immunizing children could be unhealthy for them.

The school has 26 students in grades kindergarten through 10th grade.

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■ **Inside:** How is your school doing?



Dr. Joe Klawitter, left, a pediatrician at Mercyhealth Hospital and Medical Center-Walworth, examines 1-year-old Beau Kibler of Delavan, who is up to date on his immunizations.

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