

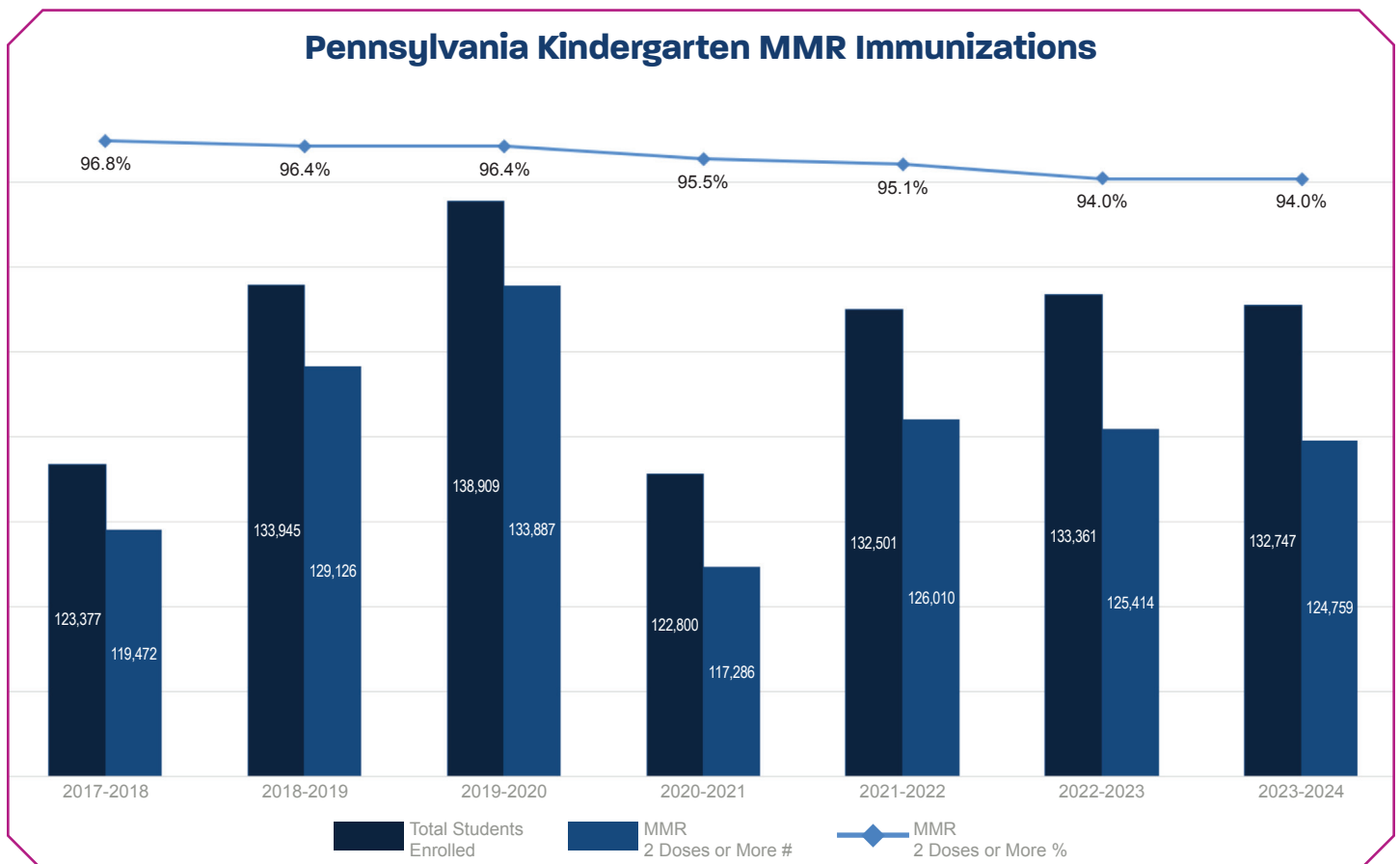


# Kindergarten Immunizations: Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) Trends in Pennsylvania

Every child should have health insurance and access to quality health care that is necessary for healthy development into adolescence and through adulthood. That care includes immunizations throughout childhood. Routine vaccinations for children are essential to keep them immune from life-threatening diseases before they are exposed. With the back-to-school season upon us, families should prioritize scheduling their children for well-child checkups so they are ready to learn.

## MMR Vaccine Trends

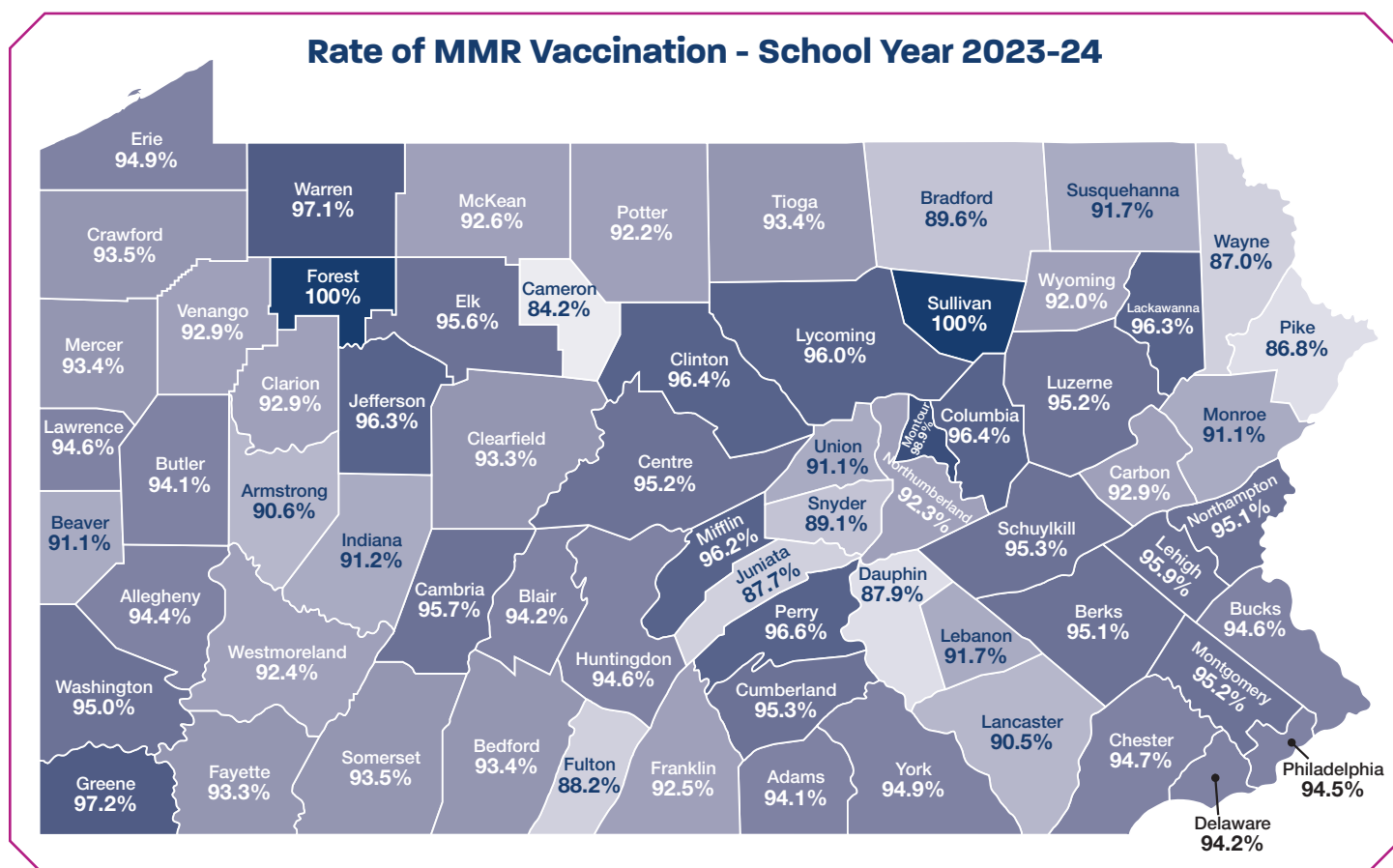
For the second year in a row, the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) coverage rate for Pennsylvania kindergarteners fell below the 95% coverage target. Nearly 8,000 kindergarteners were not up to date on their MMR vaccines during the 2023-24 school year, a number that has doubled since the 2017-18 school year. This trend is not unique to Pennsylvania.



Source: PPC analysis, Pennsylvania Department of Health, School Immunization Law Report System, School Years 2017-18 through 2023-24

Around the country, decreasing rates of MMR vaccines have put some communities at high risk for a measles outbreak. The national MMR coverage among kindergartners is 93%.<sup>1</sup> Only 11 states reported coverage levels at 95% or higher in 2023-24.<sup>2</sup>

The MMR coverage rate also varies by county. Nearly two-thirds of Pennsylvania counties (44 counties) fell below 95%, with eight counties below 90% in 2023-24. The eight counties with the lowest coverage rates are: Bradford, Cameron, Dauphin, Fulton, Juniata, Pike, Snyder, and Wayne. Compared to five years ago, only eight counties fell below 95%, with only Dauphin County below 90%.



Source: PPC analysis, Pennsylvania Department of Health, School Immunization Law Report System, School Year 2023-24

This report focuses on MMR vaccines given a resurgence of measles outbreaks across the country; unsurprisingly, other childhood vaccines for Pennsylvania kindergartners are also trending downward, including ones that protect against whooping cough (94%), chickenpox (94%), polio (94%), and hepatitis B liver infection (95%). The larger health concern regarding fewer children vaccinated is increased risk of contracting preventable diseases that can lead to severe complications, long-term health problems, and even death.

## Statewide Exemption Trends

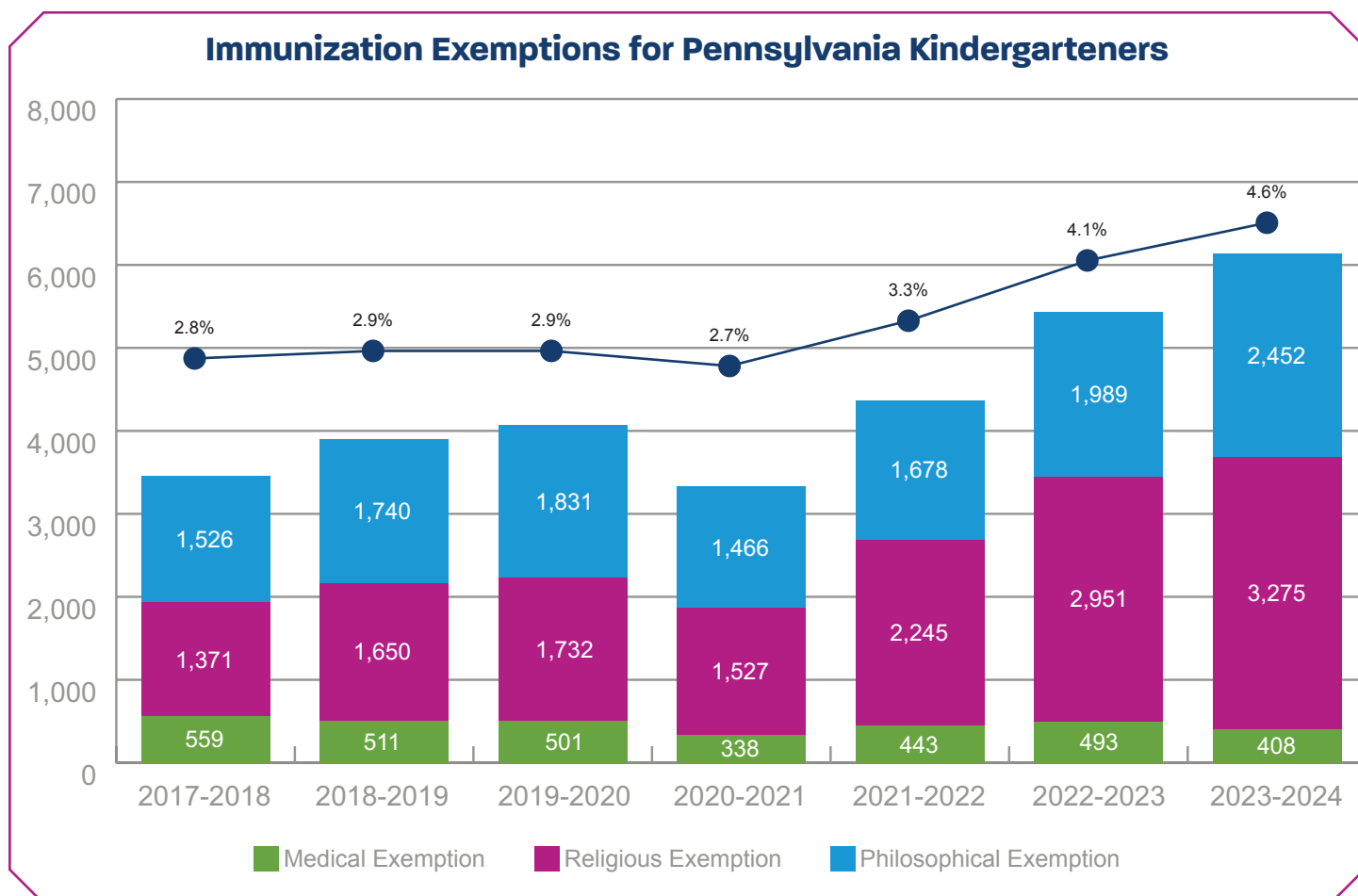
In Pennsylvania, parents may exempt their children from immunizations for medical, religious, or strong moral/ethical reasons.<sup>3</sup>

More than 6,100 kindergartners (nearly 5% of students) were exempted in the 2023-24 school year. That's up from more than 3,400 kindergartners (nearly 3% of students) who were exempted in 2017-18.

Medical exemptions, which require a physician's signature, represent the smallest category and have remained relatively steady, accounting for 0.3% of students.

Philosophical exemptions have continued to increase in both size and percentage over the past several years, accounting for nearly 2% of students.

Religious exemptions are the largest category, which showed a steep increase starting in 2021-22. Exemptions for religious reasons now account for 2.5% of students.



Source: PPC analysis, Pennsylvania Department of Health, School Immunization Law Report System, School Years 2017-18 through 2023-24

## Talk With Your Doctor

With decreasing vaccination coverage and increasing exemptions, the risk for outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases like measles goes up. **The best way to protect our children and our communities is to make sure that everyone who can receive vaccinations is able to get them.**

With the school year just around the corner, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says it's more important than ever for children to receive routine vaccinations and well-child checkups. Parents may still have questions or be understandably confused by recent changes in approach to vaccine policy in the federal government. The AAP and other trusted medical professionals continue to emphasize the importance of timely childhood vaccinations for preventing diseases and maintaining public health. Talk to your child's doctor or pediatrician about vaccine science and safety to keep kids healthy and reduce the risk for vaccine-preventable diseases.



**Back-to-school season is a good opportunity to make sure kids have the health coverage they need to be ready to learn.**

### **PA Families Have Options for Affordable Health Insurance**

Start crossing off your back-to-school list with free or low-cost health insurance. With Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), children are covered for yearly physicals, immunizations, mental health services, dental check-ups, prescriptions, and more.

Medicaid and CHIP are open for enrollment 365 days a year. Sign up for free or low-cost health insurance today and get peace of mind knowing they're covered.

**Medicaid 1-866-550-4355 or [online](#)**

**CHIP 1-800-986-KIDS (5437) or [online](#)**

Additionally, Pennsylvania's health insurance marketplace, Pennie™ is another option for families to find coverage. Enroll in a health plan during the open enrollment period starting November 1 or enroll any time of the year during a qualifying life event, like losing health insurance or having a baby.

**Pennie™ 1-844-844-8040 or [online](#)**

### **Vaccines for Children Program Offers Free Vaccines**

The Pennsylvania Department of Health has a Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program that provides vaccines at no cost to children who do not have health insurance or children whose insurance does not cover immunizations.

To learn more about eligibility and providers in your area, families should call the **Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7341a3.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/measles-elimination-status-what-it-is-and-how-the-u-s-could-lose-it/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?file=/secure/pacode/data/028/chapter23/subchapCtoc.html>

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