

HB 1469 Testimony

Representative Gretchen Dobervich

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Good Morning Chairman Weisz and Members of the House Human Services Committee. For the record my name is Representative Gretchen Dobervich and I represent District 11 in Fargo.

Rubella, a disease caused by a virus also known as German Measles, causes a red rash, fever, headache, swollen pink eyes, painful swollen lymph nodes, a heavy cough and nasal discharge. In severe cases Rubella can cause brain infections.¹

"If an unvaccinated pregnant woman gets infected with rubella virus she can have a miscarriage, or her baby can die just after birth. Also, she can pass the virus to her developing baby who can develop serious birth defects such as— heart problems, loss of hearing and eyesight, intellectual disability, and liver or spleen damage. Serious birth defects are more common if a woman is infected early in her pregnancy, especially in the first trimester. These severe birth defects are known as congenital rubella syndrome (CRS)."¹

About 25 to 50% of people infected with rubella will not experience any symptoms but are still infectious and can infect other unvaccinated adults and children.¹

There is a vaccine for Rubella, it is part of the MMR vaccine (Measles, Mumps, Rubella). The vaccine is not given prior to age one, leaving children birth to 12 months at risk. The most common side effects of the vaccine include sore arm from the shot, low grade fever, and mild rash. Rare side effects include temporary swelling in the neck or cheeks, and temporary, non-life-threatening low blood platelet count. There is a very rare risk of febrile seizures, seizures caused by fever, the older a child is when they receive the MMR vaccine the greater the risk of febrile seizure.²

You have just been informed about what the Rubella virus is, the health impacts it has on children and women, vaccination available to prevent it, and known side effects associated with the vaccine. Having been given this information, informed consent for a Rubella vaccination or for an exemption to not receive it can best be made.

HB 1469 seeks to provide information for parents and guardians about common diseases and the immunizations for their prevention, to assure no matter the choice a parent or guardian makes, it is informed.

Currently, North Dakota has the most liberal vaccination exemption laws in the United States. There is no requirement that a parent or guardian be provided information about vaccinations or the illnesses they prevent when they sign an exemption form. There is no informed consent. If a parent or guardian seeks a religious, philosophical or moral exemption they can print out a form from the North Dakota Department of Health website, or obtain one from their child's school district, sign it and submit it. Medical exemptions in North Dakota do require an exemption form signed by a Medical Doctor or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine.

HB 1469 would not remove the ability and ease at which an immunization medical exemption may be obtained in North Dakota. The bill expands the medical provider list of who may certify a medical exemption to include advance practice nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

HB 1469 would not take away North Dakota's liberal religious, philosophical, and moral exemptions. Instead, it would provide rigorously researched, scientific, evidence based information about diseases and the vaccinations for their prevention, including all known possible side effects in a 60 minute streaming video, which would be required to be watched by parents and guardians prior to signing a vaccination exemption form. This would assure that parents and guardians are providing informed consent when exempting their child from vaccination.

After watching the informed consent video, the parent or guardian will print out a certificate of completion and provide it with the vaccination exemption form. A \$50,000 fiscal note is attached to this bill for the creation of the video. In comparison to the \$2.3 million cost of Minnesota's most recent measles outbreak, this is a small amount to invest in the State's public health.

In 1964-1965 the United States experienced its last Rubella epidemic. In this epidemic, 12.5 million Americans were infected, it killed 2,000 babies and caused 11,000 miscarriages. Since 2012, only 15 cases of rubella have been reported in the United States.³

I chose Rubella as an example because when my sister was 6 months old, and too young to get the MMR vaccination, she was infected with Rubella and experienced severe symptoms. She and I were at an event where we were exposed by playing with children who had not been vaccinated and were infectious, but not yet symptomatic. I was old enough to have been vaccinated and was spared the agony of the disease, she was not. She survived and is a nurse who has cared for people hospitalized with and who have died from COVID-19.

No child in North Dakota is forced to be vaccinated without the consent of their parent or legal guardian. HB 1469 would not change this; it would expand the medical providers who may certify a medical exemption and provide information for informed consent of an exemption.

This concludes my testimony. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee I stand for questions.

Resources

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/rubella/about/symptoms.html>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/mmr-vaccine.html>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/whatifstop.htm>