

Immunizing Michigan

The University should require vaccinations for the safety of students

With the recent outbreaks of influenza in Michigan and across the country, the importance of early prevention has come to the forefront of public conversation. Healthful practices and safety precautions are being offered as possible solutions, but one of the most effective solutions — namely, vaccination — does not get the attention it deserves from University health officials. Vaccinations save the lives of millions of people every year by safely and efficiently protecting against myriad diseases. Their proven effectiveness stands starkly against the University's lackluster vaccination program. The University must improve its vaccination requirements and its vaccination-promotion program as a whole for the health and safety of its students.

Vaccines work. The absence of diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B, meningitis and varicella from everyday life is a direct benefit of laws requiring children to be vaccinated as a condition for entering public education. Public education, and specifically public higher education, fosters areas of close contact, exchange and collaboration — the same kinds of areas where diseases are often most communicable. Preventative measures should be put in place to ensure the well-being of all participants.

Diseases and infections such as influenza, meningitis, hepatitis B and human papillomavirus have an elevated risk of incidence in college environments due to students' close and continual contact with one another. Yet Michigan's higher education system does not require domestic students to show proof of vaccination upon acceptance — though some international students are required to be tested for tuberculosis.

Many other schools across the nation require vaccinations as a condition of enrollment, including the University of California, Berkeley for hepatitis B and the University of Texas for bacterial meningitis. In both instances, a state mandate compels the universities to adopt these standards, with the Texas legislation going so

far as to enforce the requirement for all higher education institutions, public or private. While Michigan's K-12 vaccination program is comparable to the rest of the country's as a result of federal guidelines, it is woefully behind in other areas where vaccinations are necessary. Hospital employees, ambulatory care physicians and correctional inmates are not required in any way to be vaccinated for any disease.

While at times on the leading edge of modern vaccination legislation, Michigan's overall hands-off approach to vaccination regulation in higher education has left many of its student-citizens susceptible. While direct, state-based legislative action might be the preferred route to improve the state's overall vaccination policies, the University must do more — if not by state mandate then on its own — to show concern for the welfare of its students. At the very least, the University must increase the awareness and the availability of vaccines for its students, staff and faculty.

Students should be protected and feel safe from the dangerous diseases that are easily spread. One of the easiest and most effective ways to do this is to emphasize preventative health measures and make them available. Vaccines save lives, and with the proper promotion and standards, so too will the University.