



Deliberative Scenario: MMR Vaccination Concerns within a Local Immigrant Community

Recently, in a community with a large Somali immigrant population, a five-year-old Somali child at the local elementary school was diagnosed with measles. This case caused concern among parents that a measles outbreak was imminent. The superintendent of the local school district contacted the county Community Services Director, and a conversation arose about whether the local "no shots, no school" law, which has been on the books for years but never enforced, should now be enforced.

The "no shots, no school" law dictates that children cannot attend school without having received a set of vaccinations, which includes the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Families can request exemptions under limited special circumstances. Outbreaks of measles, mumps, and rubella are uncommon in the state, as over 90% of children in most demographic groups receive the MMR vaccine. However, within the Somali community only 40-50% of children receive the MMR vaccine.¹

Some members of the Somali community have previously expressed concerns regarding vaccinations, including a fear of autism caused by vaccines, and whether vaccines adhere to Halal requirements. Given that the current case involves a Somali child, there are concerns in the local health department that the Somali community could become stigmatized, especially if other cases of measles arise.

At the request of the Community Services Director, the Public Health Director asked the ethics committee to discuss the best course of action in this situation.

To address this problem comprehensively, you have broadened the group to include a teacher or school administrator, leaders from the local Somali community and mosque, the school nurse, a local pediatrician, health department disease control and prevention staff, the county attorney's office, parents of students at the elementary school, refugee



Last Update: October 30, 2016

services worker. Please come to the deliberation having read the following background material:

- [“Guide to Democratic Deliberation for Public Health Professionals,”](#) Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues (attached).
- [“Addressing MMR Vaccine Resistance in Minnesota’s Somali Community,”](#) *Minnesota Medicine*.¹

¹ Bahta, L. and A. Ashkir. (2015). Addressing MMR vaccine resistance in Minnesota’s Somali community. *Minnesota Medicine*, 98(10), 33-36.