



# Rocky Mountain News

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## State launches vaccine campaign

### Officials hope drive lifts Colorado out of last-place ranking

By Bill Scanlon  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

With federal infectious disease authorities in town Thursday, state health officials kicked off a marketing campaign to lift Colorado out of last place in childhood immunization levels.

The \$68,000 marketing campaign and \$350,000 in grants to counties will boost the number of children totally immunized by their second birthdays, said Douglas Benevento,

executive director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

The goal is to make immunizations accessible and affordable to any Colorado parent who doesn't have a religious or philosophical objection to it, Benevento said.

The campaign, "Immunize Colorado's Kids: Protect the Ones you Love," features drawings by kids and posters in both English and Spanish.

Immunization cards and wallet cards will be distributed widely. A new Web site, [www.immunizecoloradoskids.org](http://www.immunizecoloradoskids.org), has additional information.

The announcement coincided with the annual visit by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials to review Colorado's immuniza-

tion program.

Lt. Gov. Jane Norton said immunizations are safe and "vitaly important to the health of our children. Every Colorado child should be fully immunized."

Many infectious diseases, such as whooping cough, can spread quickly if numerous people aren't immunized.

Still, Benevento said, Colorado laws allow parents to opt out of vaccines for their kids — and "parents are the ones who should make those judgments for themselves."

Colorado ranked last in the nation in the percentage of children fully immunized in 2002 and 2003, a ranking blamed on a shortage of the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, combined with the state's unwillingness to pay a premium to purchase the

scarce supply for its low-income kids.

In 2002, just 63 percent of Colorado 2-year-olds had had all their shots, according to the National Immunization Survey. That climbed to 69 percent in 2003 and 71 percent last year, as the shortage eased and the state allotted federal funds to enhance the vaccine effort.

Counties are encouraged to use the \$350,000 in grants — allotted by the legislature — in creative ways.

Chaffee County, for example, purchased a Ford van, which takes immunizations to the people.

"They sit on their moms' laps," public health nurse Missy Tanner said, pointing to a comfortable love seat inside the van. "We don't wait for them to come to us. We come to them."

In Aurora, Fire Station No. 2 be-

comes an immunization clinic once a month with help from paramedic firefighters, nurses and volunteers from the Rotary Club, said Battalion Chief Katherine Ridenhour.

The program already has gotten 2,500 children fully vaccinated in less than two years, Ridenhour said. Parents are encouraged to make a \$15 donation per shot, but if they don't have the money, the donation is waived.

New state laws grant authority and allot money for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to send postcard reminders to parents when their children need vaccines, starting next year.

"That's an excellent idea," said Ridenhour, noting her department already has started sending out reminders.