



From the IMA Public Health Committee

## **Change to the Immunization Reminder Information System (IRIS) from Opt-out to Opt-in Being Debated in the Legislature**

**What is IRIS?** It is a free, state-run electronic system that consolidates immunization-related information into a single centralized record. It can be used by healthcare providers, public health professionals, schools, and childcare providers to check immunization records. It can help healthcare providers determine which immunizations are due and provides official immunization records. IRIS is password-protected and allows only individuals with a need-to-know the ability to access records. The information in IRIS serves to enhance the care of individuals, families, and communities.

**How does it work in practice?** For example, if, during a pediatric visit, a parent does not remember if their child has received an immunization (e.g., happened at a different clinic, urgent care, or pharmacy), the provider can use IRIS to determine current immunization status and needs. IRIS maintains immunization data from state-wide sources, so it helps decrease the risk of missing or duplicating vaccinations. It also makes school registration easier for parents, as all the information is found in one place.

**What is the opt-in/out system?** Currently, kids are enrolled automatically at birth, but it wasn't always like that. In 2010, the Idaho legislature changed IRIS from an *opt-in* to the current *opt-out* system. Before 2010, the vast majority of parents opted their kids into IRIS at birth. By the first year of age, virtually all parents opted their kids into the system. This bump from birth to year one was in large part due to the effort of primary care providers across Idaho, who set up processes to remind parents to enroll their kids in IRIS. Over the past few years, only a few dozen Idahoans annually have chosen to opt out of IRIS.

**What's happening in the legislature?** HB 397, a bill that would change the IRIS system from opt-out to opt-in, has been introduced and will be debated in the Idaho legislature.

**What would a change back to opt-in mean?** Mainly, it would add work and expense for healthcare providers, like establishing processes to remind patients to enroll in IRIS, and systems to maintain and share records for non-IRIS patients (i.e., obtain consents to share each time records are requested). This will disproportionately impact small and rural practices. It will also increase costs to the state as opt-in registries are more expensive to maintain.

**Public Health Committee's Perspective:** One key principle of public health is to create an environment where people can make the right decision for their own health. Opt-out vaccination registries help create such an environment. Previous experience indicates that Idahoans overwhelmingly want to enroll their kids in the IRIS registry. A switch to an opt-in system would create barriers for them to do this—increasing the burden on already strained parents and healthcare providers, and increasing costs, especially in rural clinics.