

SUBJECT: Immunization of students for hepatitis B

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Berlanga, Hirschi, Glaze, Maxey, McDonald, Rodriguez
0 nays
3 absent — Coleman, Delisi, Janek

WITNESSES: For — Jean D. Neal Jr. and Lynn F. Lennox Jr., RPh., for SmithKline Beecham Pharmaceuticals
Against — None
On — Diane Simpson, M.D., Texas Department of Health, Jan Ozias.

DIGEST: HB 1745, as amended, would not allow a child to be admitted to a Texas elementary or secondary school unless the child had been fully immunized against hepatitis B. Immunization against hepatitis B would not be required until the Texas Board of Health adopted rules specifying an implementation date. The department could stagger implementation.

The bill would take immediate effect if approved by two thirds of the membership of each house.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Hepatitis B is a highly infectious disease that can lead to chronic liver disease or liver cancer. Public health strategies for controlling hepatitis B have focused on immunizing persons at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases — a strategy that has proven ineffective in stopping the spread of the disease. Public health experts now believe the most effective long-term strategy is to immunize children at an early age.

Immunizing children would help eliminate hepatitis B among future populations. The state already requires, and delivery systems are in place for, immunization of prospective public school students against mumps, diphtheria, rubeola, rubella, mumps, tetanus and poliomyelitis. Adding

hepatitis B immunization to the list would be uncomplicated and would help public health efforts.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

While the bill is well intended it would fail to address the real problem of immunizing those who are most vulnerable to hepatitis B, namely young adults. Hepatitis B is spread by the transfer of bodily fluids, and those who are sexually active or who use intravenous drugs are most susceptible. Health experts estimate that there are 1.2 to 1.5 million silent carriers of hepatitis B. To truly eradicate this disease immunization must take place among the young adult population.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would authorize the Department of Health to set the effective date for the hepatitis B immunization requirement and to stagger implementation.