

Red Deer Catholic School Board won't follow Calgary's lead

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Schools in the Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division will not be following the Calgary Catholic School District's (CCSD) decision to consult parents on whether the HPV vaccine should be offered to its female students, say officials.

A motion last week has the CCSD administration beginning a process of consultation, which may eventually led to the HPV vaccine being offered in CCSD schools as part of Alberta Health Services' school vaccination program.

In 2008, the province of Alberta adopted a program

to cover the cost of the vaccine for Grades 5 and 9 girls, but a few school boards opted out of the program including eight school districts in the central and southern parts of the province.

The Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division, which has over 7,500 students in 18 schools throughout Red Deer, Sylvan Lake, Rocky Mountain House, Innisfail and Olds, was one of the boards that decided to opt out of the program.

Red Deer board chairwoman Christine Moore said board members are letting parents make the decision for themselves.

"I think that is one of the great things that has come

of this issue, it's been a hot topic so people are talking about it and I think in light of that they've educated themselves," said Moore.

A pro-vaccination group, called HPV Calgary, has threatened to take legal action against the CCSD board over the current anti-vaccine policy and last week Dr. Ian Mitchell, University of Calgary pediatrics professor also called on the board to lift its ban on providing the vaccine to its students.

Some individuals oppose the vaccine, saying it promotes promiscuity and implicitly condones premarital sex.

The HPV vaccination, commonly known as Gardasil, has been a contro-

versial topic since its suggested introduction to schools a few years ago through the Alberta Health Services' school vaccination program.

The vaccine prevents four strains of the sexually-transmitted virus that most commonly lead to cervical cancer.

Bishop Fred Henry of the CCSD said he didn't want it to seem like the school district was condoning premarital sex and had other moral and religious concerns, but a recent study's finding, funded by the Kaiser Permanente health management organization in the United States and Emory University, looked at the link between girls' promiscuity and receiving

the HPV vaccination.

"We saw no increase in pregnancies, sexually-transmitted infections or birth-control counselling, all of which suggest the HPV vaccine does not have an impact on increased sexual activity."

Robert Bednarczyk, an epidemiologist and lead author of the study says they followed 1,398 girls aged 11 to 12 in Georgia during the first 18 months after the vaccine became available.

"The board of trustees, in respecting parents as the primary educators of their children, and in light of recent medical studies and developments, as well as consultation with our bishop, direct the chief super-

intendent to commence a consultation process with parents to receive their feedback with respect to offering the administration of the HPV vaccine in our district schools for the board's further consideration," says Janet Corsten, senior communications specialist of the Calgary Catholic School District.

Girls and women up to age 26 who are not eligible for vaccination through school programs, are able to get the vaccine, which costs \$525, through their local clinics in three doses. The vaccine is targeted at females between the ages of nine and 21, but available to any female aged nine to 45 and male nine to 26.

MVC councillor open houses hear about road concerns

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At open houses last week, ratepayers in Mountain View County Reeve Bruce Beattie's Div. 4 and councillor Kevin Good's Div. 1 expressed a desire to see more done toward the upkeep and maintenance of county roads.

MVC Div. 4 ratepayers asked questions about roads and county plans for the road network at Reeve Beattie's open house at the Fallen Timber Community Hall on Nov. 1.

"Roads are the primary issue with people," said Beattie. "They expressed concerns about the impact of oil and gas activities on the roads, and wanted to make sure we are maintaining the roads to a standard that the public wants."

Other issues discussed at the Nov. 1 meeting included fire agreements, and support for community halls.

About 25 people attended the Nov. 1 meeting.

The same number of people attended Good's open house at the Carstairs Community Hall on Oct. 30.

"I was pleased with the meeting and with the comments," said Good.

"There were a lot of households represented."

A number of residents at the 90-minute meeting asked about the county's policy when it comes to grading of gravel roads in the division and whether there are plans to increase the frequency and type of grading.

Coun. Good said he had received numerous calls from residents regarding the county's grading policy and that he is in agreement that improvements are needed.

"It's something I've been harping on for two years," said Good, noting that road upkeep is the county's top

expenditure every year.

The matter of road maintenance, including grading, will be the subject of an upcoming review of the county's road maintenance policy, he said.

Good said he would like to see the county's graders use wider blades and have packers installed at the rear of the vehicles, so both grading and packing can take place at the same time.

Ratepayers at the open house also expressed concerns about a landfill being proposed for a four-quarter

block at Highway 791 and Highway 575, southeast of Carstairs.

The site would see oil-field-contaminated soil trucked to the location.

The county has not approved the project and no public hearings have yet been held.

At the request of residents at the Oct. 30 meeting, county CAO Tony Martens said he will be gathering more information about the proposed project and will provide that information to Coun. Good, who, in turn, will

inform council and Div. 1 residents of the findings.

Before the project could go ahead a rezoning from agriculture would have to be approved by council, said Martens.

As well, he said council might bring the matter up with the Alberta Environment Minister at a meeting in Edmonton next week.

In an interview following the Oct. 30 meeting Good said: "We are going to get some answers and do what we can to help the citizens have their opinions known

to the province."

Another question raised at last week's open house involved the status of the Carstairs sewage lagoon, with several residents asking how well the lagoon is handling the population increase in the area in recent years.

Martens said he would be in contact with lagoon officials to find out details.

Telephone communication between residents and the county office was also brought up as an area of concern.

"People are not happy

that they can't talk to staff, that they always have to leave voice mails," said Good.

"I'm going to be discussing that in council, about changing that culture a bit."

The county's road network is scheduled to be the subject of budget deliberations at the county council meeting this week.

Meanwhile, the councillor open houses wrap up this week with councillors Al Kemmere and Duncan Milne hosting their information sessions.

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