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Childhood vaccination rates plunge

Who is most vulnerable,
and what can be done?

By Cindy Krischer Goodman
South Florida Sun Sentinel

Despite an outbreak of measles last year in a Weston elementary school, Broward County saw a dramatic drop in its immunization rate for kindergartners in 2025. In Broward, only 82.2% of

2024-25 kindergartners got their required vaccinations — the lowest level in 15 years. The public health goal is a vaccination rate of 95% — the level that makes it unlikely that a single infection will spark a disease cluster or outbreak. The declining rate reflects the heated debate raging on social media and among South Florida parents. “There’s a lot of distrust in the health system,” said Daniela Rodri-

guez, a Broward County mother with two children in elementary school and a 1-year-old. “After COVID, people have gotten more educated about vaccines and have started questioning things that weren’t questioned before.” Public health officials focus on vaccination rates for kindergartners because elementary schools can be hot spots for germs and origins of community spread. By kindergarten, children must be

vaccinated for diseases including measles, mumps, rubella, polio, chicken pox, and Hepatitis B. Outbreaks often start in small, localized areas, where the level of vaccination in that community determines its risk. The other South Florida counties also have low immunization coverage in kindergartners. Palm Beach County reported 89.8% of 2024-25 kindergartners received their required vaccines, and Miami-

Dade reported 91%. Florida’s statewide rate for kindergarten vaccinations is 88.8%, well below the national average of 93%. “When the rate is low, we are at an increased risk of some of these diseases we have seen eliminated making a comeback,” said Jennifer Takagishi, a Tampa pediatrician and vice president of the Florida **Turn to Rates, Page 6**



The Boca Raton sought an exception to the city's height restrictions. AMY BETH BENNETT/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

Resort seeks approval for new height

Historic Boca Raton plans to add 8-story residential building to property

By Abigail Hasebrook
South Florida Sun Sentinel

The Boca Raton resort, a storied getaway whose history dates to the 1920s, plans to introduce a new offering: an eight-story residential building that rises 100 feet.

The Boca Raton’s owner wants to redevelop part of the hotel’s property — a little more than 1 acre at 501 E. Camino Real — and construct a 76-unit “modern luxury housing opportunity” on a portion of the golf course and hotel site, according to city docu-

ments. The maximum height of this new building would be 100 feet, but where The Boca Raton is zoned only allows for buildings as tall as 85 feet. The city’s Planning and Zoning Board recently recommended approval for the height

increase to 100 feet during a city meeting, with planners pointing out that this exception would only apply to The Boca Raton. The requested height increase exclusively applies to properties part of “planned development master plans,” covering at least **Turn to Resort, Page 6**

Records hint at origin of Hope Florida deal

Governor’s office was to discuss \$67M settlement, foundation received significant share a day later

By Skyler Swisher and Jeffrey Schweers
Orlando Sentinel

On Sept. 10, 2024, state health officials planned to brief Gov. Ron DeSantis’ office on a lucrative deal that had been three years in the making. The topic: a \$67 million

Medicaid settlement that could soon come Florida’s way, newly released records show. The day after that scheduled meeting, the health agency’s top lawyer shared a new draft of the agreement — one that set off a political firestorm months later in Tallahassee.

The settlement would still be for \$67 million, but it would peel off millions for the Hope Florida Foundation, the charity arm of the initiative spearheaded by Florida first lady Casey DeSantis, the documents reveal. Hope Florida ultimately got \$10 million, which it funneled to two nonprofit organizations that in turn gave \$8.5 million to a political committee controlled by the governor’s then-chief of staff, James Uthmeier. That

committee was set up to defeat a ballot initiative to legalize recreational marijuana. The finalized agreement, with the Hope Florida Foundation a recipient, became public earlier this year, igniting a bipartisan legislative probe and sparking questions about whether highly regulated Medicaid dollars were illegally used for political purposes. **Turn to DeSantis, Page 2**

Delray officers cleared in crash

By Angie DiMichele
South Florida Sun Sentinel

Six Delray Beach Police officers have been cleared after the internal investigation of an off-duty car crash in 2023 involving the firefighter who would later be terminated for driving a fire engine into the path of a Brightline train. Delray Beach Fire Rescue driver-engineer David Wyatt drove a \$1 million ladder truck around lowered gates and onto the tracks on Dec. 28 while responding to an emergency call, violently colliding with the Brightline traveling at nearly 80 mph. He and two fellow firefighters, along with 15 Brightline passengers, were injured. Wyatt was issued a noncriminal traffic citation earlier this year and fired in April for the crash. The December crash led to numerous investigations and brought to light that multiple Delray Beach Fire Rescue employees, including Wyatt, drove fire engines and rescue trucks with suspended licenses at some point during their employment without supervisors’ knowledge. Wyatt’s license was active at the time of the Brightline crash. The police department launched an internal review earlier this year of six officers involved with the investigation of a June 9, 2023, single-car crash, where Wyatt drove into a tree on West Atlantic Avenue and injured his head. That 2023 crash led to his license suspension. Officers Romy Florvil, Eljesa Musliu, Lois Pimentel and Nicolas Windsor in addition to Sgts. Oscar Leon and James Schmidt were reviewed for a possible “duty responsibility” violation, for an allegation that they failed to conduct a DUI investigation or to arrest Wyatt, the records obtained by the South Florida Sun Sentinel on Friday show. The allegation **Turn to Cleared, Page 6**

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