

Immunization Program Immunization Exemption Factsheet January 25, 2017

- Enforcement of mandatory immunization requirements for children entering childcare facilities and schools has resulted in high immunization coverage levels and has significantly reduced or eliminated the occurrence of vaccine preventable diseases.
- All states allow for medical exemptions, 5 states do not allow religious exemptions, 19 allow philosophical exemptions, and three (California, Mississippi and West Virginia) do not allow exemptions for religious or philosophic reasons.
- Iowa law allows for medical and religious exemptions from required vaccines.
- Medical and religious exemption rates in students kindergarten through 12th grade have increased since 2000 (Medical 0.19% - 0.38%, Religious 0.3% - 1.30%).
- The number of Religious Immunization Exemptions continues to increase annually and comprise 1.30% (6,737) student enrollment kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Philosophical exemptions play a role in the increase of unvaccinated populations.
- Studies indicated geographic areas with higher rates of immunization exemptions are more likely to have vaccine preventable disease outbreaks. *Omer SB, Enger KS, Moulton LH, Halsey NA, Stokley S, Salmon DA. Am J Epidemiol 2008;168:1389-96.*
- Achieving and maintaining high immunization rates is necessary to prevent the spread of vaccine preventable diseases and protects those who cannot be vaccinated because of age or medical reasons.
- The following organizations have position statements against philosophical or personal belief immunization exemptions:
 - American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)
 - American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
 - American College of Physicians
 - American Medical Association (AMA)
 - Association of Immunization Managers (AIM)
 - Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)
 - Every Child by Two (ECBT)
 - Infectious Disease Society of America
 - Institute for Vaccine Safety, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
 - National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)
 - National Conference of State Legislatures Information
 - Pediatric Infectious Disease Society

The following studies demonstrate the negative impact of philosophical exemptions on the nation and communities.

- Research based on nationwide surveillance data has demonstrated that children with exemptions were 22 times more likely to have had measles and 5.9 times more likely to acquire pertussis than children who had not been exempted from vaccination. *Feikin DR, Lezotte DC, Hamman RF, Salmon DA, Chen RT, Hoffman RE. Individual and community risks of measles and pertussis associated with personal exemptions to immunization. JAMA 2000; 284:3145-50.*
- In some cases, research has found that children with exemptions are as much as 35 times more likely to contract measles than vaccinated children.

Omer SB, Salmon DA, Orenstein WA, deHeart MP, Halsey N. Vaccine Refusal, Mandatory Immunization, and the Risks of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases. NEJM 2009; 360: 1981-8.

- Research shows the overlap between clusters of exemptions and disease. A study conducted in Michigan demonstrated the increased likelihood of a cluster of pertussis cases being within a cluster of exempted children.
Omer SB, Salmon DA, Orenstein WA, deHeart MP, Halsey N. Vaccine Refusal, Mandatory Immunization, and the Risks of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases. NEJM 2009; 360: 1981-8.
- States with philosophical belief exemptions had higher pertussis incidence than those states without philosophical belief exemptions.
Omer SB, Pan WK, Halsey NA, Stokley, S, Moulton LH, Navar AM, et al. Nonmedical exemptions to school immunization requirements; secular trends and association of state policies with pertussis incidence. JAMA 2006; 296 (14): 1757-63.
- Philosophical belief exemptions also have financial consequences to the society, including the costs to families and public health for treating disease and controlling outbreaks. A study modeling the effects of a philosophical belief exemptions demonstrated that annual hospitalization and non-medical costs, like time missed from work or school, related to pertussis disease would increase by 50% if the state added a philosophical belief exemption.
Wells KB, Omer SB. The financial impact of a state adopting a personal/philosophical belief exemption policy: Modeling the cost of pertussis disease in infants, children and adolescents. Vaccine 2012; 30: 5901-5904.

Immigrants/Refugee

- Immunizations are *not* required for refugees prior to U.S. departure, but they are still highly recommended, assessed by panel physicians during the visa medical exam, and may be administered (i.e. a series started or continued) overseas depending on availability and what country the refugee is being processed in.
- Upon arrival to the U.S., the CDC leaves it up to individual states and resettlement agencies to ensure that refugees receive a comprehensive initial health screening (ideally within the first 30 days of arrival), and this is meant to include an assessment and update of immunizations (according to ACIP recommendations).
- The initial health assessment is not *required* by USCIS or the CDC, but it is *highly recommended*. However, the [Reception and Placement Cooperative Agreement](#) (through the Office of Refugee Resettlement) does require that resettlement agencies ensure that every refugee has a health assessment (or linkage with a health clinic) within 30 days. If this is not accomplished, resettlement agencies must provide justification as to why the health assessment was not completed, and may risk loss of funding as a result.
- Immunizations will *eventually* be required by USCIS when applying for adjustment of status (which for refugees typically happens after they have been in the U.S. for one year).
- The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) does require immunizations for legal permanent resident status. However, exemptions are allowed under the following circumstances:
 - You are opposed to vaccinations in any form– that is, you cannot obtain a waiver based on an objection only as to one vaccination
 - Your objection must be based on religious beliefs or moral convictions; and
 - The religious or moral beliefs must be sincere.
- Immigrant children in Iowa are still required to receive vaccinations in accordance with Iowa Code.

States with best immunization rates

- During the 2015-16 school year, kindergarten students residing in states with both religious and philosophical exemptions, were granted philosophical exemptions four times more than religious exemptions.
- California and Vermont have recently passed laws to repeal philosophical exemptions.
- During the 2015-16 school audit report, four out of five states with the highest Kindergarten coverage levels for MMR vaccine did not have a philosophical exemption. One of the four states (Mississippi) only allow for a medical immunization exemption.

State	MMR Vaccine Coverage Level (Percent of enrolled Kindergarten students who received 2 doses of MMR vaccine.)	Exemptions Permitted	Rank
Maryland	99.4%	Medical, Religious	1
Mississippi	99.4%	Medical	2
Delaware	97.6%	Medical, Religious	3
Texas	97.6%	Medical, Religious, Philosophical	4
North Carolina	97.3%	Medical, Religious	5
Iowa	91.8%	Medical, Religious	43

- During the 2015-16 school audit report, 100% of the top five states with the highest Kindergarten coverage levels for DTaP vaccine did not have a philosophical exemption. Two of the five states (Mississippi and Louisiana) only allow for a medical immunization exemption.

State	DTaP Vaccine Coverage Level (Percent of enrolled Kindergarten students who received 5 doses of DTaP vaccine.)	Exemptions Permitted	Rank
Maryland	99.6%	Medical, Religious	1
Mississippi	99.4%	Medical	2
Louisiana	98.3%	Medical	3
Virginia	98.3%	Medical, Religious, Philosophical-HPV vaccine only	4
Delaware	98.0%	Medical, Religious	5
Iowa	91.8%	Medical, Religious	42