



Strengthening Nevada's Immunization Laws

Immunizations are recognized as one of the most beneficial and cost effective public health measures, and are responsible for saving tens of millions of lives.¹ School and child care immunization requirements have been shown to effectively increase immunization coverage and provide an important public health benefit by reducing rates of vaccine-preventable diseases.^{2, 3, 4, 5}

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have regulations requiring proof of immunization for child care and school attendance as a public health strategy to protect children in these settings, and to promote timely immunization of children by their caregivers.⁶ Growing anti-vaccine sentiments have put recent immunization gains at risk, as evidenced by increased disease outbreaks. While some parents continue to question vaccine safety and effectiveness, the science continues to show that vaccines are safe and a critical tool in preventing the spread of deadly and devastating diseases.

States may grant exemptions to child care and school immunization requirements, and these exemptions vary state-to-state.⁷ Nevada is one of 28 states that allow medical or religious exemptions, but not philosophical/personal belief exemptions. Additionally, Nevada excludes exempted students during a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak, for two weeks or however long the disease in question incubates, and acknowledges to parents exemptions may not be recognized in the event of an outbreak.

Each school year, state and local areas report to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the estimated number of children attending kindergarten who have received vaccinations required, or who have received an exemption to one or more vaccinations. Based on Nevada's Annual Kindergarten Survey, public schools have an average 2% religious exemption rate, while private schools have an average 4% religious exemption rate.

Leading national organizations recommend the following interventions to encourage informed parental decision-making and to reduce risk of illness among unvaccinated children:

- Conduct routine surveillance of school immunization records to identify gaps in immunization coverage related to exemptions, and periodically reassess the impact of exemptions on disease rates.
- Before a child is granted an exemption, the parents or guardians must sign a statement or form delineating the basis, strength, and duration of their belief; their understanding of the risks refusal to immunize has on their child's health and the health of others (including the potential for serious illness or death); and their acknowledgement they are making the decision not to vaccinate on behalf of their child.

- The form should also state that in the event of an exposure to a vaccine-preventable illness, their child would be excluded from school and all school-related activities for the appropriate two incubation periods beyond the date of onset of the last case, which is standard public health practice.
- School systems and child care facilities should require annual renewal of exemptions. This process would provide multiple opportunities for education regarding the value of vaccinations and the responsibilities inherent in choosing not to be vaccinated. The parents would thus be required to make an informed decision annually rather than just once.
- Provide the community with information about immunization rates in child care centers, schools, and other covered entities and determine whether there are risks to community immunity based on this information.

Nevada has a robust surveillance and reporting system which allows for easily identifiable gaps in immunization coverage. However, Nevada lacks a standardized statement and/or form for requesting an exemption. Immunize Nevada has developed a risks and responsibilities of not vaccinating document, and it is available to child care facilities and schools for their use when an exemption is requested. This informational piece is a step forward in strengthening Nevada's immunization requirements, and reducing the use of religious exemptions.

Exemptions, like immunizations, carry responsibilities that need to be recognized. Vaccines are not only about a single child; they are about protecting all Nevadans, but especially those who cannot be vaccinated, including infants still too young; children who have medical contraindications to vaccination; individuals who have weakened immune systems; and the elderly. Every opportunity should be taken to provide accurate and timely information to parents that will encourage compliance with school and child care vaccination requirements.

¹Olshen Kharbanda et al. (2010) Changes in Tdap and MCV4 Vaccine Coverage Following Enactment of a Statewide Requirement of Tdap Vaccination for Entry into Sixth Grade. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(9), 1635-1640.

²Jacobson v. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 197 U.S. 11 (1905).

³. Davis MM, Gaglia MA. Associations of daycare and school entry vaccination requirements with varicella immunization rates. *Vaccine. 2005;23*(23):3053–3060

⁴. Ernst KC, Pogreba-Brown K, Rasmussen L, Erhart LM. The effect of policy changes on hepatitis A vaccine uptake in Arizona children, 1995-2008. *Public Health Rep. 2011;126*(suppl 2):87–96

⁵. Lopez AS, Kolasa MS, Seward JR. Status of school entry requirements for varicella vaccination and vaccination coverage 11 years after implementation of the Varicella Vaccination program. *J Infect Dis. 2008;197*(suppl 2):S76–S81

⁶ AAP COMMITTEE ON PRACTICE AND AMBULATORY MEDICINE, AAP COMMITTEE ON INFECTIOUS DISEASES, AAP COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, AAP COUNCIL ON SCHOOL HEALTH, AAP SECTION ON ADMINISTRATION AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT. Medical Versus Nonmedical Immunization Exemptions for Child Care and School Attendance. *Pediatrics. 2016;138*(3):e20162145

⁷ States with Religious and Philosophical Exemptions from School Immunization Requirement. (July 2010). *National Conference of State Legislatures*. Retrieved on May 22, 2013 from: <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=14376>

For more information about immunizations and Nevada, please visit ImmunizeNevada.org, follow us on social media or email info@immunizenevada.org