

IMMUNIZATION EXEMPTIONS TOOLKIT FOR HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONERS

Dear Health Care Practitioner,

Children are required to have documentation of immunity to certain diseases or an exemption on file at the school or child care on or before their first day of attendance, RCW [28A.210.080](#). Parents and legal guardians may exempt their child from one or more of the immunization requirements by turning in a completed Certificate of Exemption (COE) form. This requirement is outlined in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) [28A.210.090](#).

All exemptions except religious membership exemptions require education from a health care practitioner on the benefits and risks of immunizations. Health care practitioners must sign the Health Care Provider declaration on the COE or they can write and sign a letter with the same information. If the education is documented in a letter, it must be attached to the parent/guardian-signed COE before being turned in to the school or child care. A health care practitioner who, in good faith, signs that they gave immunization education is immune from civil liability for providing the signature, per RCW [28A.210.090](#).

Specific health care practitioners are allowed to provide the parent/guardian with information about the benefits and risks of immunization and grant a medical exemption. Only physicians (MD), physician assistants (PA), osteopaths (DO), naturopaths (ND), or advanced registered nurse practitioners (ARNP) licensed in Washington State can complete the COE, per RCW 28A.210.090.

The health care practitioner may grant a medical exemption to a required immunization based on their judgment the vaccine is not advisable for the child. When the health care practitioner determines the specific vaccine is no longer contraindicated, the child will be required to have the vaccine.

With the exception of the medical exemption outlined above, providing a signed statement affirming that information was provided to the parent/guardian about the benefits and risks of vaccination does not mean that the health care practitioner agrees with or endorses the parent/guardian's beliefs.

This toolkit provides information and resources to health care practitioners about exemptions for school and child care immunization requirements for the state of Washington.

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If you have questions about this toolkit or need more resources, please visit www.doh.wa.gov/SCCI or email oischools@doh.wa.gov.

CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE & INSTRUCTIONS	
This document explains the four types of exemptions and information on how to fill out the form.	
English (PDF)	
Español-Spanish (PDF)	
Русский - Russian (PDF)	
Українська - Ukrainian (PDF)	

CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION (COE) form	
English (PDF)	Kajin M̧ajōl - Marshallese (PDF)
Español-Spanish (PDF)	پښتو - Pashto (PDF)
አማርኛ - Amharic (PDF)	Português - Portuguese (PDF)
العربية - Arabic (PDF)	ਪੰਜਾਬੀ - Punjabi (PDF)
中文 - Chinese (PDF)	Русский - Russian (PDF)
Fosun Chuuk - Chuukese (PDF)	Af-soomaali - Somali (PDF)
دری - Dari (PDF)	Tagalog (PDF)
हिन्दी - Hindi (PDF)	Українська - Ukrainian (PDF)
한국어 - Korean (PDF)	Tiếng Việt - Vietnamese (PDF)

IMMUNIZATION EXEMPTION VIDEO	
Immunization Exemptions Overview Video (YouTube)	A brief (8m 41s) video explaining Exemptions to the WA Immunization Requirements.

HOW TO BILL VACCINE COUNSELING	
How do I bill for stand-alone vaccine counseling?	Find billing code in the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) Well-Child Program Billing Guide



CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

For personal/philosophical and religious exemptions, health care practitioners can document that they have provided the parent or legal guardian with information about the benefits and risks of immunization. They do this by signing the health care practitioner statement on the Certificate of Exemption (COE) form, or they can give the parent a letter stating the same information. This letter, when attached to Certificate of Exemption form with parent/guardian signature, meets documentation of the education requirement in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.210.090. A health care practitioner who, in good faith, signs affirming the immunization education is immune from civil liability for providing the signature, following RCW.

To be acceptable documentation of the parent/guardian education, the letter must include:

- The child's name and birthdate
- A statement affirming the health care practitioner has discussed the benefits and risks of immunizations with the parent/legal guardian.
- Documentation that the health care practitioner is a MD, ND, DO, ARNP, or PA licensed in Washington State.
- A health care practitioner signature.

CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION EDUCATION CONSIDERATIONS

State law says the health care provider must discuss the benefits and risks of immunizations with the parent/legal guardian who is seeking an exemption from the immunization requirements. The law does not provide additional any details about education. This gives health care providers the flexibility to educate the parent or legal guardian on the benefits and risks of immunizations. However, some providers may want more guidance on immunization education before they feel comfortable talking to families.

The Department of Health has a [Plain Talk About Childhood Immunizations](#) booklet which helps health care providers understand immunization information and have conversations with their patients. Health care providers may find a variety of information in the booklet helpful, including topics on how vaccines work, common questions and answers, vaccine safety, and comparing disease and vaccine risks.

Health care providers who have immunization conversations with family members should approach the conversation in an open and friendly manner. Creating long term relationships with patients and building trust through understanding is important to help hesitant families decide if they should vaccinate in the future.

Families may have different perspectives, barriers, life experiences, or concerns which may influence their request for a Certificate of Exemption form. Talking to families about their thoughts and understanding their choices with vaccination will help to guide your conversations with them. According to RCW 28A.210.090, the parent has the right to request the exemption. Although the Department of Health does want to ensure children receive life and illness protecting vaccinations, it is important to respect the parent's right. Refusal by an authorized provider to provide the education and sign the COE, could create barriers for the child to attend school or child care as well as other barriers for the family.

For additional resources to guide immunization conversations with families, see the education resources section.

Immunization Exemption FAQs

Find more FAQs at www.doh.wa.gov/SCCI

[What kinds of exemptions are available for parents who want to exempt their child from the school or child care immunization requirements?](#)

There are four different types of exemptions:

Medical Exemption: A health care practitioner may grant a medical exemption to a vaccine required by rule of the state board of health only if in his or her judgment, the vaccine is not advisable for the child. When it is determined that this particular vaccine is no longer contraindicated, the child will be required to have the vaccine.

Philosophical/Personal Exemption: To be used when the parent/guardian has a personal or philosophical objection to the immunization of the child. A philosophical/personal exemption may not be used to exempt a child from the measles, mumps or rubella vaccine requirements (effective July 28, 2019).

Religious Exemption: To be used when the parent/guardian has a religious belief that is contrary to the required immunization.

Religious Membership Exemption: To be used when the parent/guardian affirms membership in a church or religious body that does not allow them to take their child for medical treatment from a health care practitioner (MD, DO, NP, PA, ARNP). Because it is against their religious beliefs to get medical treatment from a health care practitioner, this exemption does not require a health care practitioner signature.; RCW 28A.210.090.

[How do I know if my child qualifies for a medical exemption?](#)

Your child's healthcare provider will determine if they need to be temporarily or permanently exempted from receiving a vaccine for a medical reason. Medical contraindications and precautions to vaccination are outlined in the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' [\(ACIP\) recommendations and guidelines](#) published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Medical contraindications to vaccination are rare.

[Does a temporary medical exemption need to have an expiration date?](#)

Yes, health care practitioners must put the date that the temporary exemption ends on the Certificate of Exemption. School, preschool, or child care staff should monitor temporary exemptions. When the temporary exemption ends the child can be in conditional status for up to 30 days in order to get the missing immunization or another exemption.

<p>When completing medical exemption section of the Certificate of Exemption (COE) form, does the health care practitioner need to identify the reason why the vaccine is not advisable for the child?</p>	<p>It is not required to provide the reason for granting the medical exemption. This information is not requested on the Certificate of Exemption form.</p>
<p>How do health care practitioners, school or child care staff determine if a religious or religious membership exemption is based on actual religious beliefs?</p>	<p>It is not recommended that school or child care staff attempt to verify the religious beliefs of a parent/guardian requesting a religious or religious membership exemption. A completed Certificate of Exemption is all that is required. The role of the health care practitioner is to provide information to the parent/guardian. The health care practitioner's signature indicates that they have provided the information, not that they have assessed the parent's religious beliefs.</p>
<p>Does the Certificate of Exemption (COE) need to be signed by a healthcare practitioner?</p>	<p>In most cases, yes. Parents or guardians requesting a medical, philosophical, or religious exemption must have the signature of a health care practitioner (MD, DO, ND, ARNP, PA) licensed in Washington state confirming that they provided the parent with information about the benefits and risks of immunizations. A practitioner may also write and sign a letter containing the same information instead of signing the COE. This letter must be attached to the parent signed COE. If granting a medical exemption, the practitioner must complete the medical exemption section of the COE.</p> <p>A health care practitioner does not need to sign the COE if the parent claims a Religious Membership exemption. This exemption states that the parent's religious beliefs do not allow medical treatment of their child by a health care practitioner. This exemption does not require a health care practitioner signature. Parents/guardians who have a religious objection to vaccination but whose children obtain care from health care practitioners need to use the religious exemption which requires a health care practitioner signature.</p>
<p>Which providers are allowed to sign the Certificate of Exemption (COE)?</p>	<p>Only a health care practitioner can sign the COE. A healthcare practitioner is defined as a physician (M.D.), physician assistant (P.A.), osteopath (D.O.), naturopath (N.D.), or advanced registered nurse practitioner (A.R.N.P.) licensed in Washington state. For more details, see Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.210.090.</p>
<p>Do health care practitioners face any liability for signing the Certificate of Exemption (COE)?</p>	<p>A health care practitioner who, in good faith, signs the statement that they have provided the parent with information about the benefits and risks of immunization for the child, are immune from civil liability for providing the signature. For more details, see Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.210.090.</p>



<p><u>Is a health care practitioner required to sign a religious exemption form, or can they refuse?</u></p>	<p>This is not addressed in state immunization law. A health care practitioner should speak with their professional organization or discuss with their own legal counsel. The role of the practitioner is to provide information and their signature indicates they have provided the information, not that they have assessed or agree with the parent's religious beliefs.</p>
<p><u>If a family has an out-of-state exemption on file signed by a MD, then do they still need to have a Washington State Certificate of Exemption (COE)? Can a school or child care provider accept a Washington state COE signed by a health care provider in another state or country?</u></p>	<p>A certificate from another state cannot be used to exempt a student from the WA state immunization requirements. The Washington state Certificate of Exemption form must be used and the health care practitioner (MD, DO, ND, and ARNP, PA) who signs it must be licensed in Washington state. For more information, see the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.210.090.</p>
<p>Find more FAQs at www.doh.wa.gov/SCCI</p>	

Educational Resources	
Need Help Responding to Vaccine-Hesitant Parents? (immunize.org)	This PDF has Science-based materials available from respected organizations; AAP, California Department of Public Health, CDC, immunize.org, Institute for Vaccine Safety, Vaccinate Your Family, and CHOP VEC.
Communicating with Families and Promoting Vaccine Confidence (aap.org)	This page includes resources for communicating with families about immunizations including responding to parent concerns and vaccine hesitant parents.
Immunizations - HealthyChildren.org	This AAP page includes links to many general and disease specific articles about vaccination.
Vaccine Basics - Answers to Common Questions about Vaccines (vaccineinformation.org)	This page for the public includes links to information about how vaccines work, the importance of vaccines, vaccine safety, and a video library.
Why it's Important to Vaccinate Your Children CDC	This CDC page for parents includes links to the vaccination schedule, vaccine-preventable diseases, vaccine safety and FAQs.
Vaccine Schedule for Children 6 Years or Younger CDC	This CDC page has the parent friendly immunization schedule for children 6 years old and younger and information about vaccine-preventable diseases.
Vaccine Schedule for Children, 7 to 18 Years Old CDC	This CDC page has the parent friendly immunization schedule for children 7 to 18 years old and information about vaccine-preventable diseases.
14 Diseases You Almost Forgot About (Thanks to Vaccines) CDC	This CDC page has information about 14 vaccine-preventable diseases with links to more detail on each disease and its vaccine
Vaccine Basics - Answers to Common Questions about Vaccines (vaccineinformation.org)	This page for the public includes links to information about how vaccines work, the importance of vaccines, vaccine safety, and a video library.
Clear answers and smart advice about your baby's shots by Ari Brown, MD, FAAP	This flyer has Q&A for parents' questions about vaccination. Immunize.org
Clear answers and smart advice about your baby's shots by Ari Brown, MD, FAAP - Russian	This flyer in Russian has Q&A for parents' questions about vaccination. Immunize.org
Home - Institute for Vaccine Safety	Johns Hopkins Institute for Vaccine Safety Q&As
Evidence shows vaccines unrelated to autism	Three page document covering vaccines and autism. Immunize.org
Questions About Vaccines? - Vaccinate Your Family	Vaccinate your Family Q&A, also in Spanish
Vaccine Safety Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (chop.edu)	CHOP Vaccine Education Center
Cultural Competency in Health Services and Care	While old, this document has some good prompts for understanding diverse cultural beliefs and reducing language barriers. Washington State Health Systems Quality Assurance.

How Should Clinicians Should Respond to Language Barriers that Exacerbate Health Inequity?	This AMA Journal of Ethics article discusses the importance of addressing language barriers and understanding biases towards patients with Low English Proficiency (LEP).
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Vaccine Contraindication Resources	
Pinkbook Course Book: Epidemiology of Vaccine Preventable Diseases CDC	CDC reference on vaccines by disease including contraindication and precautions.
Birth-18 Years Immunization Schedule – Healthcare Providers CDC	Appendix with contraindications and precautions by vaccine.
Vaccine Package Inserts	Listed alphabetically by vaccine. Immunize.org
Guide to contraindications and precautions to commonly used vaccines for all ages	Comprehensive list of contraindication and precautions to administering vaccines. Immunize.org

