

Exemptions to School and Child Care Immunization Requirements

Quick Reference Guide

A child can have an exemption from one or more of the required immunizations for school or child care entry ([RCW 28A.210.090](#)). To request an exemption, a parent or guardian must complete and sign the Certificate of Exemption form (COE) and turn it in to the child's school or child care center.

For all exemptions except Religious Membership exemptions, the COE must be signed by a health care practitioner saying they have given the parent or guardian information about the benefits and risks of immunizations. Instead of signing the COE the health care practitioner can write and sign a letter with the same information. The letter should be attached to the COE signed by the parent or guardian. A health care practitioner who is allowed to sign the COE must be a physician (MD), physician assistant (PA), osteopath (DO), naturopath (ND), or advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP) licensed in Washington State ([WAC 246-105-020](#)).

If a child has an exemption in place and then gets a dose of that vaccine, the school or child care is encouraged to check with the parent or guardian to see if the exemption is still being requested. If a child with an exemption has had all of the required doses of a vaccine the exemption is not needed and the immunization status of the child for that disease is complete.

Four Types of Exemptions:

Medical Exemption: A health care practitioner may grant a medical exemption to an immunization requirement only if in their judgment, the vaccine is not advisable for the child. When the reason for the medical exemption is no longer valid the child must get the vaccine. Guidance on medical exemptions can be found in the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) publication, "Guide to Vaccine Contraindications and Precautions," www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/general-recs/contraindications.html. Information is also in the manufacturer's vaccine package insert.

Medical exemptions may be permanent or temporary.

- **Permanent medical exemption:** This exemption does not have an expiration date and is used when the reason for the medical exemption is not expected to change.
- **Temporary medical exemption:** This exemption has an expiration date and is used when the reason for the exemption is temporary. Health care practitioners must put the date that the temporary exemption ends on the COE. School, preschool, and child care staff should monitor temporary exemptions. When the temporary exemption ends the child can stay in school or child care in conditional status for up to 30 days to get the missing vaccinations or another exemption.

Philosophical/Personal Exemption: This is used when the parent or guardian has a personal or philosophical objection to the vaccination of their child. The parent or guardian does not need to explain their personal or philosophical belief. A philosophical/personal exemption cannot be used to exempt a child from measles, mumps or rubella immunization requirements.

Religious Exemption: This is used when the parent or guardian has a religious belief that prohibits giving the vaccine to their child. The parent or guardian does not need to explain their religious belief. The health care practitioner, school, preschool and child care staff do not need to verify the religious beliefs of the parent or guardian.

Religious Membership Exemption: This is used when the parent or guardian belongs to a church or religious group that does not allow their child to get medical treatment by health care practitioners. School, preschool and child care staff do not need to verify the religious beliefs of the parent or guardian. This exemption does not need a healthcare practitioner signature. If the parent or guardian has a religious objection to the vaccine but takes their child to see a health care practitioner for things like illness and injury care this is not the appropriate exemption. They should use the Religious Exemption area of the COE which must have a healthcare practitioner signature.

COE Form and Frequently Asked Questions: www.doh.wa.gov/SCCI



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How to Complete the Certificate of Exemption (COE) Form

- Complete the section of the COE for the exemption being requested:
 - Only one type of exemption (personal/philosophical, religious, or medical) is allowed for each disease.
 - Different types of exemptions are allowed for different diseases.
- Write the child's name and birthdate at the top of the COE form.
- Once completed give the COE to the school or child care.

Personal/Philosophical and Religious Exemptions

The parent/guardian should:

- Check the box in the personal/philosophical or religious section for each disease they want to have an exemption.
 - Check only one type of exemption for each disease.
- Take the form to a health care practitioner (MD, DO, ND PA, ARNP licensed in WA).
- Discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination with the health care practitioner.
- Read, sign and date the parent/guardian declaration.

The health care practitioner should:

- Discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination with the parent/guardian.
- Read, sign and date the health practitioner signature line.
- Check the appropriate box (MD, DO, ND PA, ARNP) and add their professional license number issued by the state of Washington.
 - A health care practitioner who, in good faith, signs the statement is immune from civil liability for providing the signature, RCW [28A.210.090](#).
 - Instead of signing the form, the health care practitioner can give the parent/guardian a signed letter that can be attached to the parent signed COE. The letter must include the child's name, information in the declaration statement and professional license number issued by the state of Washington.

Religious Membership Exemptions

This exemption is only to be used if the parent/guardian belongs to a church or religion that does not allow their child to receive medical treatment from a health care practitioner. Medical treatment includes injury and illness care.

The parent/guardian should:

- Read, sign and date the parent/guardian declaration.

Medical Exemptions

This exemption is only used if the child has a medical condition that prevents them from being vaccinated.

The health care practitioner should:

- Complete the medical exemption table:
 - Check the appropriate box for each disease. Indicate if the disease is not exempt, permanently exempt, or temporarily exempt.
 - If the exemption is temporary, write the date the temporary exemption ends.
- Discuss the benefits and risks of vaccination with the parent/guardian.
- Read, sign and date the health practitioner signature line.
- Check the appropriate box (MD, DO, ND, PA, ARNP) and add the professional license number issued by the state of Washington.

The parent/guardian should:

- Read, sign and date the parent/guardian declaration.