



AAP: Nonmedical exemptions to school immunization requirements should be eliminated

July 28, 2025

Jesse M. Hackell, M.D., FAAP

Article type: [News](#)

Topics: [Infectious Diseases](#), [School Health](#), [Vaccine/Immunization](#)

The AAP has reaffirmed its position that state laws requiring certification of immunization as a condition of children's attendance at child care and school are critical tools to keep those environments safe for students and staff.

In a revised policy statement, the AAP also recommends that medically indicated exemptions to specific immunizations be available to children when appropriate and that pediatric clinicians familiarize themselves with the indications for such exemptions and provide them only when medically justified.

Further, it encourages all states, territories and the District of Columbia to eliminate acceptance of nonmedical exemptions and to develop procedures to assure that any medical exemptions approved have a sound scientific basis behind them.

The policy statement *Medical Versus Nonmedical Immunization Exemptions for Child Care and School Attendance* is available at <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2025-072714> and will be published in the August issue of *Pediatrics*.

The policy, which updates a 2016 policy that was reaffirmed in 2022, is from the Committee on Practice and Ambulatory Medicine, Committee on Infectious Diseases, Committee on State Government Affairs and Council on School Health.

Rise in nonmedical exemptions

States across the country are seeing increases in the number of children with nonmedical exemptions from immunizations. In the 2022-'23 school year, over 3% of children nationally had a nonmedical exemption from at least one required vaccine.

In certain geographic areas, uptake levels of some vaccines are falling below rates needed to prevent spread of diseases. This can lead to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, resulting in morbidity, mortality and increased public expenditures to control such outbreaks.

The policy statement discusses the benefits of widespread childhood immunization requirements. Such laws and policies not only help prevent disease in those who are immunized, they also protect children who cannot be vaccinated due to age or underlying medical issues. The result is a safer environment for all members of the school and child care community.

Legal, religious, ethical issues

Legal precedents for immunization requirements and the patchwork of state regulations and implementation also are presented. At the time the statement was written, five states permitted solely medical exemptions. The policy notes that this lack of consistency among states may impair the national public health goal of protecting as many children and community members as possible, and make it more difficult to achieve the goals of the Healthy People 2030 initiatives.

The policy authors, who have backgrounds in community pediatrics, school health, public health, bioethics, health policy and infectious disease, discuss the legal, religious and ethical issues that surround the promulgation and implementation of immunization requirements.

Although none of the major world religious traditions proscribe immunizations, expression of personal religious belief is common and protected. At the same time, the variety and richness of individual beliefs make interpretation of any request for a "religious" exemption extremely complex.

The policy does not support requiring anyone to be immunized against their beliefs. Rather, immunization may be required as a condition of school or child care attendance (in the absence of a medical indication for exemption) to benefit the community and public health.

The authors also discuss the bioethical principles involved in development of immunization requirements, including the concept that parents generally have great autonomy in making medical decisions for their children. Exercise of this autonomy, however, requires that it be used solely for the benefit of the children.

The policy discusses how to balance parental autonomy with the state's interests in protecting school communities and children who are unable to be protected by vaccination. It notes that permitting only medical exemptions constrains parental authority as little as possible while attempting to optimize the public health benefit.

It further acknowledges that making immunizations a condition for school attendance may create challenges for families who depend on schools for services for their children but that this requirement balances these challenges with improved individual and community safety.

Recommendations

Following are among the policy's recommendations:

- The AAP supports requiring certification of immunization for child care and school attendance to provide a safe environment for students and staff.

- The AAP supports medically indicated exemptions to specific immunizations for individual students.
- States, territories and the District of Columbia should eliminate all nonmedical exemptions from immunizations as a condition of school attendance and ensure that medical exemptions are appropriate and evidence-based.
- Pediatric clinicians should continue to work with families who have not yet chosen to vaccinate or who request nonmedical vaccine exemptions, helping them understand how vaccination benefits their children, family and community.
- Pediatricians should not participate in vetting or endorsing applications for nonmedical exemptions from immunization for child care or school attendance.
- Public health authorities should monitor vaccine uptake levels and make this information public to enable parents to determine the safety of child care centers and schools, and communities to assess outbreak risks.

Dr. Hackell is a lead author of the policy statement and former chair of the AAP Committee on Practice and Ambulatory Medicine.

Copyright © 2025 American Academy of Pediatrics