

School Nurses Q&A PA99-0249 (SB1410): "Certificate of Religious Exemption"

1. What is a Certificate of Religious Exemption?

A Certificate of Religious Exemption is a form that a parent/guardian completes when they are requesting that their child be exempt, on religious grounds, from school required immunizations. Parents will be able to find the form [here](#).

What information is included on the Certificate of Religious Exemption?

On the certificate form, a parent/guardian must provide a specific statement of religious belief(s) for each immunization for which they are requesting an exemption. There is no change to the required statement of religious belief.

The primary health care provider responsible for the child's physical must also sign the form, indicating that they spoke to the parent about the benefits of immunizations.

2. What is the purpose of the Certificate of Religious Exemption?

The Certificate of Religious Exemption preserves a parent's option to exempt their child from immunizations, but also ensures that such a decision is an informed one and that the parent is aware of the individual and public health risks of choosing not to immunize their child and that the child may be barred from school attendance in the event of an outbreak.

3. Why do we need this form?

At the time this legislation was passed, Illinois had more than 13,000 children with religious exemptions - the fifth highest in the United States. Low rates of immunizations put all children and adults at risk for vaccine preventable diseases such as measles and pertussis. Other states that have enacted legislation requiring education and/or a signature from a healthcare provider have seen fewer parents requesting exemptions from lifesaving immunizations. It is hoped that when parents are educated about the benefits of immunizations, some will opt to immunize their child.

4. What was the previous process for obtaining a religious exemption?

Previously, parents wrote a letter asking for the religious exemption stating each immunization(s) they were religiously opposed to and their specific religious objection. The current form will ask for the same information, in addition to requiring the health care provider's signature certifying that the provider discussed the benefits of immunizations with the parent or guardian.

5. When does the Certificate of Religious Exemption go into effect?

Because many parents had already submitted physicals and immunization exemption requests prior to the date of enactment of this legislation in August 2015, and in many cases, with school registration in the spring or early summer, **the new form will be required with exemption requests beginning Oct. 16, 2015**

6. Where is the Certificate of Religious Exemption submitted?

As in previous years, requests for religious exemptions should be submitted to the local school authority. In most cases the school nurse is charged with reviewing exemption requests. The deadline to submit the exemption is October 15, 2015.

7. What constitutes a religious exemption?

According to Illinois law: "An objection must set forth the specific religious belief that conflicts with the exam or immunization. The religious objection may be personal and need not be directed by the tenets of an established religious organization." HOWEVER, "General philosophical or moral reluctance...will not provide a sufficient basis for an exemption to statutory requirements." This new form does not change the existing definition of religious exemption.

8. Does this law place an unfair burden on parents seeking a religious objection?

This bill requires no new health provider visits for parents seeking religious objections. The Certificate of Religious Exemption is only required in conjunction with school physical forms: Kindergarten, 6th and 9th grades.

All school-required physicals are covered by insurance (no added cost) including Medicaid and private insurance.