



Illinois
State Board
of Education



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School Immunizations – New Certificate of Religious Exemption Requirement

Exemption certificate requires health care provider signature

SPRINGFIELD – Parents or legal guardians who object, for religious reasons, to their child being immunized for school entrance must submit a Certificate of Religious Exemption, which now must be signed by a health care provider. Signed into law on August 3, 2015, this new legislation requires a health care provider to sign the certificate confirming they have provided education to the parents or legal guardians about the benefits of immunizations and the health risks of not vaccinating students.

“Vaccines not only help protect vaccinated individuals, but also help protect entire communities by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases,” said Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “Because vaccines are not always 100 percent effective, it is important that as many people as possible are immunized to decrease the amount of disease circulating and help prevent illness and possibly even death.”

Educational information given by health care providers may include nationally accepted recommendations from federal agencies such as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, information from vaccine information statements, and vaccine package inserts.

“We recognize the importance of providing an option for religious exemption, but we also understand there must be a balance between family rights and the health of all students,” said State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith, Ph.D. “This certificate ensures that parents and students are fully aware of the risks of not being immunized.”

The certificate also reflects the parents or legal guardians understanding that their child may be excluded from school in the case of a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak or exposure. Parents or legal guardians must submit the certificate to their local school authority prior to children entering kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade. This new requirement will be in place for religious exemption requests beginning October 16, 2015.

The new Certificate of Religious Exemption form will soon be available on both the IDPH and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) websites.

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