

16-01

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### School and Childcare Immunization Requirements

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports implementation of childcare, school, and university immunization requirements based on recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). To maintain high immunization rates and protect communities from vaccine preventable diseases, NACCHO supports requirements that allow only medical exemptions due to allergy or medical contraindication.

To successfully enact effective school-entry and childcare immunization requirements, NACCHO urges the following actions by local and state governments and educational institutions:

- Implement requirements that follow the ACIP recommended vaccination schedule and require proof of immunization from a licensed medical professional or valid documentation from a state immunization registry.
- Implement requirements that include students who attend public and private schools, as well as homeschooled students who participate in public or private school activities.
- Implement requirements that ensure all public and private schools report student vaccination status to state/local health departments.
- Make school vaccination and exemption rates publicly available.
- Increase resources to conduct school record and medical office record reviews with electronic systems, such as state immunization registries, to monitor compliance with immunization and exemption documentation requirements.
- Increase financial support to local health departments, school nurses, and/or state/local immunization coalitions to educate parents, guardians, healthcare providers, and students about immunization requirements and the importance of vaccination.
- Increase resources and financial support for ensuring equitable access to vaccination services for all students.
- Advocate for policies that reduce or eliminate religious and philosophical (non-medical) exemptions from the requirements.

If immunization requirements that only allow for medical exemptions are not feasible, the following steps can be taken to limit non-medical exemptions:

- Use exemption forms that require parents/guardians or students  $\geq 18$  years to acknowledge the risks involved in refusing vaccinations.



- Use exemption forms that require parents/guardians or students  $\geq 18$  years to acknowledge that in the event of an exposure to a vaccine-preventable illness, the exposed individual may be excluded from school and all school-related activities for the appropriate incubation period beyond the date of exposure, as per standard public health practice.
- Notify parents, guardians, and college and university students of school and childcare vaccination and exemption rates annually.
- Evaluate exemption procedures annually.
- Require that exemption forms be renewed at least annually.
- For individuals requesting non-medical exemptions, require (1) documentation from a medical provider regarding the refusal to vaccinate and consultation pertaining to risks; and/or (2) consultation and signature by the local health department or school district health personnel; and/or (3) mandatory education sessions about the importance of immunization and the impact of refusing immunizations which require acknowledgement of risk of non-medical exemptions for parents, guardians, or student  $\geq 18$  years.

School and childcare entry requirements, as with other public health interventions, must be introduced, exercised, and implemented judiciously to preserve the health of communities and the rights of individuals, parents, and community members. The decision of when to add a vaccine to school requirements should be made strategically, taking into account the following factors: characteristics of the vaccine and community; ACIP recommendations; vaccine safety and effectiveness; vaccine coverage in the absence of a requirement; stable and adequate vaccine supply; disease burden, severity, and communicability; and operational considerations, such as cost and ability to effectively implement and monitor compliance. Health equity considerations such as vaccine access and education regarding the safety and efficacy of vaccines should also be taken into consideration when developing and implementing immunization requirements in order to best equip families and communities to meet these requirements.

### **Justification**

Vaccines are a cost-effective tool for protecting children and adults against serious and potentially fatal diseases.<sup>1</sup> School and childcare entry requirements have been shown to effectively increase immunization coverage rates and reduce rates of disease.<sup>2</sup> Increased immunization coverage in school settings increases protection for the school population that cannot be immunized due to age or medical reasons.

Many states grant exemptions to childcare and school immunization requirements for medical, religious, or philosophical (personal, moral, or other) reasons.<sup>3</sup> Un- or under-immunized students are at increased risk for acquiring vaccine preventable diseases and pose a risk for transmitting infection to susceptible persons in the community.<sup>4,5</sup> Furthermore, on a population level, geographic areas with high rates of immunization exemption have been shown to have higher rates of vaccine preventable diseases.<sup>2</sup> During the 2021-2022 school year, the median percentage of kindergarteners with an exemption from one or more required vaccines increased from the 2020-2021 school year.<sup>6,7</sup> Studies show that states in which it is easier to obtain an exemption have higher exemption rates than states in which it is harder to do so, and this, in turn, is associated with higher disease risk.<sup>8,9</sup>

Vaccine requirements are also important beyond the K-12 school years. College and university students are considered high risk for exposure and transmission of vaccine preventable diseases, such as meningococcal disease and mumps as result of close living quarters, social activities, and other conditions unique to college/university life; therefore, immunization requirements remain important in this setting.<sup>10</sup>

Given the relationship between vaccine exemptions and increased disease incidence, every opportunity should be taken to provide accurate and timely information to parents to encourage compliance with childcare, school, and university, vaccination requirements.

## **References**

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## **Record of Action**

*Proposed by NACCHO Immunization Workgroup*

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