

Your Question:

You asked about vaccine requirements to enter school and any religious exemptions from those requirements.

Our Response:

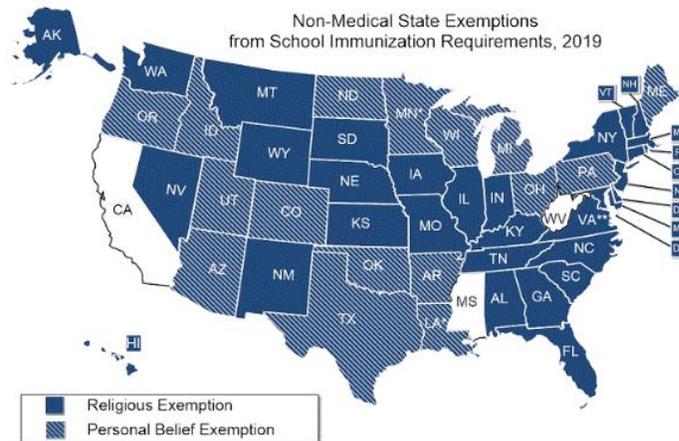
All [50 states](#) and D.C. have state policy requiring vaccines for students. Exemptions are provided in all states to students who have documented medical reasons for not being vaccinated. All but three states (California, Mississippi, and West Virginia) allow exemptions for personal or religious beliefs. Sixteen states allow philosophic exemptions for people who object to immunizations for personal, moral, or other beliefs. The criteria for obtaining a religious or philosophic exemption vary widely by state.

Vaccine Requirements and Religious Exemptions

In 2014, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) reported that over the previous two decades, immunizations prevented more than 21 million hospitalizations and 732,000 child deaths in the United States.

Vaccine Requirements for School Entry

Generally, states require parents to provide the school, district, or state with written documentation that the child has been vaccinated. Frequently parents are provided with a window of time to provide documentation of the child's immunization record.



Source: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/school-immunization-exemption-state-laws.aspx>

State Immunization Policy Examples:

- [Colorado:](#)
 - **Immunization Requirement:** The state requires that students provide the school with an up to date certification of immunization from a doctor. Parents or guardians can also provide authorization for a public health official to administer the immunization.

- **Grace Period:** The parent or guardian has 14 days after being notified to provide the record to the school.
- **Immunization Exemptions:** The state allows medical, [religious, and philosophical exemptions](#).
- **Oversight:** The state department of health oversees the immunization and exemption process. The department of education is required to post the required immunizations in addition to recommended immunizations publicly. The schools are responsible for collecting immunization records.
- **California:**
 - **Immunization Requirement:** Students must be fully immunized upon school entry.
 - **Grace Period:** State statute does not identify a grace period.
 - **Immunization Exemptions:** The only permissible exemption is for medical reasons.
 - **Oversight:** The state department of health, in consultation with the department of education, have adopted rules to enforce the state immunization policy. School districts are responsible for ensuring that all students have documentation for their grade level before school entry.
- **Illinois:**
 - **Immunization Requirement:** Upon school entry parents or guardians are required to provide proof of vaccination
 - **Grace Period:** If a student’s parent or guardian has not provided the school with a record of their immunizations, they have until October 15th to provide the appropriate documentation.
 - **Immunization Exemptions:** The state allows medical and religious exemptions.
 - **Oversight:** The department of public health sets the immunization requirements for school entry. Schools must collect immunization records of their students and administer the process of ensuring students are vaccinated. Schools are required to report to the state department of education the number of students who are vaccinated and receive exemptions in their school.

Religious Exemptions

There are only three states (California, Mississippi, and West Virginia) that do not provide a religious exemption. Generally, religious exemptions are provided when a parent has a sincere religious belief against their child being vaccinated. What constitutes a sincere religious belief, the entity who may grant the religious exemption and the conditions that must be met vary by state.

State Exemption Examples:

- **Illinois:** The state permits religious exemptions. Parents must complete a Certificate of Religious exemption and submit the form to their child’s school. The certificate must include a statement of their belief and objection in addition to a signature from a physician verifying that the parent was provided with relevant information about the vaccines. It is up to the school to determine if the religious exemption is valid.
- **Minnesota:** The state does not explicitly state that students and parents have a religious exemption. However, parents or guardians can provide the school with a notarized statement that states the student has not been immunized because of conscientiously held beliefs. In a 2019 [analysis](#) of state immunization policy, NCSL noted that the language used by Minnesota is similar to other state’s philosophical? exemption statutes.
- **Pennsylvania:** The statute states that if a parent or guardian submits in writing an objection based on religious, moral, or ethical grounds, the child does not need to be immunized. The written notice must be provided to the [principal of the school the child attends](#).