

On behalf of the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians and the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, we are writing in support of the revisions to the administrative rules for Childhood Immunization requirements (665) and College immunization requirements (694).

Our organizations are in full support of the *Certificate of Religious Exemption* for parents/guardians that want to exempt their child from school required vaccines on religious grounds. While the rules preserve a parent's option to exempt their child from immunizations on religious grounds, the rules also ensure that such a decision is an informed one and that the parents are aware of the individual and public health risks of choosing not to immunize their child.

These rules would NOT remove religious exemptions for parents or legal guardians who object to school required health examinations, screenings or immunizations (or any part thereof) on religious grounds. It does NOT change what constitutes a religious belief. The signed certificate would also reflect that the parent or legal guardian understands their school's exclusion policies in the case of a vaccine preventable disease outbreak or exposure. Furthermore, the Certificate must also be signed by the authorized examining health care provider *responsible for the performance of the child's school-required health examination*, confirming that they have provided education to the parent on the benefits of immunization and the health risks to the student and community of the communicable diseases for which immunization is required. **The health care provider's signature on the Certificate reflects only that education was given and does not allow a health care provider to determine a religious exemption.**

Certificates would be required on the same schedule as school physicals (Kindergarten, 6th and 9th grades) and therefore, would not require any extra visits with a health care provider or added costs to those persons requesting a religious exemption. Most importantly, the rules do not change the ability of children to receive a medical exemption for immunization.

While Illinois recognizes a person's right to a religious exemption, the number of religious exemptions in Illinois have risen at an alarmingly fast pace. We know, by some parents' own admissions, that the religious exemption in Illinois has become a "catch-all" for all parents that want to exclude their children from state- required school immunizations. To that end, studies have shown that states with easily obtained non-medical exemptions have higher rates of pertussis and measles. Furthermore, states with simpler immunization exemption procedures have non-medical exemption rates that are more than twice as high as those states with more complex procedures.

If these rules can help lower the rate of religious exemptions even slightly in Illinois, that can result in less people spreading dangerous vaccine-preventable diseases to our most vulnerable populations in Illinois: babies that are too young to be immunized and the immunocompromised, such as people with cancer.

We urge the adoption of these rules.

Respectfully submitted,

IAFP and ICAAP