

Office of School Health
28-11 Queens Plaza North, Room 402, Long Island City NY 11101

TO: Parents of New York City Public School Children
FROM: Terrance Peele, Health Services Manager
Department of Education Immunization Program
RE: Request for Exemption from Immunization Requirements

In accordance with the New York State Public Health Law, all students attending New York City Public Schools must be immunized against the following diseases: diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, Pneumococcal infection, Hepatitis B, Meningococcal and Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib).

Studies have shown that a student who has not been vaccinated is more likely to contract a vaccine preventable disease. Since no vaccine is 100% effective, some children who have been vaccinated may also be infected through contact with a child who has not been immunized. Schools with students who have not been immunized are much more likely to suffer an outbreak of one of these illnesses.

In the event that a case of a vaccine preventable disease occurs in your child's school and your child has not obtained the required immunization, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has the right to require that your child be excluded from school for at least one incubation period after the onset of the last case. For example, if a case of measles is diagnosed, students who have not received a measles vaccine will be excluded from school during the outbreak and for an additional 18 days after the onset of the last case in the school.

Section 2164 of the Public Health Law permits the following two exemptions to this mandatory immunization requirement:

- (1) If the parent objects to the immunization because the parent holds genuine and sincere religious beliefs which are contrary to the requirement that the child be immunized; or
- (2) If a New York State licensed physician certifies that such immunization may be detrimental to the child's health.

Religious Exemptions

If you are seeking a religious exemption for your child, you must provide a written explanation of the foundations for your religious belief opposing immunization. In your own words, describe the religious principles that guide your objection to immunization. Also, indicate whether you are opposed to all immunizations, and if not, the religious basis that prohibits particular immunizations.

A letter from you, a lawyer, a member of the clergy or other individual simply indicating that you have such a religious belief, without any further explanation, is inadequate to support the granting of an exemption.

If the information you submitted in support of the exemption request is not sufficient for the DOE to make a determination, you may be asked to provide additional documentation within ten school days of receipt of letter. Please note that the Public Health Law does not authorize the granting of exemptions based upon personal, moral, secular, scientific or philosophical beliefs.

Documentation in support of a religious exemption should be submitted to the designated individual in your school. That person will forward your letter and any supporting documentation to the Health Director in the NYCDOE Borough/Citywide Office. The Health Director will forward the documentation to the Office of School Health. Your request will then be reviewed and you will be notified of its approval or denial.

Appeal Process for Religious Exemption

-If your child is not offered an exemption, you may appeal the denial by arranging an interview with your Health Director within ten school days of receipt of letter. It is the sole responsibility of the parent/guardian to respond to OSH in all matters related to the Religious Exemption appeal process, including but not limited to arranging, confirming appointments and attending all meetings. Attorneys, clergy and/or politicians are not permitted to participate in this appeal process. During this appeal process, your child will be permitted to remain in school.

-If the appeal is denied, you may appeal the denial to the NYS Commissioner of Education within thirty (30) days of the decision, pursuant to Education Law Section 310. During this appeal process, your child will not be permitted to remain in school.

Medical Exemptions

If you are seeking a medical exemption, you must provide a completed "Medical Request for Immunization form" from a New York State licensed physician certifying that one or more of the required immunizations are detrimental to your child's health. The form is available at the school. The form should specify which immunizations may be harmful to your child and for how long the immunization(s) would be detrimental. Your school will forward documentation in support of a medical exemption to the Office of School Health for review. Medical exemptions are in effect for a period of not more than one year from the date of issue unless it is permanent.

If you have concerns about any of the required vaccines, you should discuss them with your child's physician. You may also consult the following web sites:

www.immunize.org/safety

www.vaccinesafety.edu

www.vaccine.chop.edu

www.immunizationinfo.org

If you have questions about vaccine safety or the need for a medical exemption to immunization, you may contact the Bureau of Immunization at 347-396-2400 and ask to speak with a physician with expertise in these issues.