Oregon School Immunization Law: What Changes on March 1, 2014?

(Updated February 20, 2014)

In 2013, Oregon passed legislation that changes the process for claiming a nonmedical exemption to school immunization requirements. This law goes into effect on March 1, 2014. More information is available at www.healthoregon.org/vaccineexemption

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the new law change?
The new law requires parents and guardians who want to claim a nonmedical exemption to receive education about the benefits and risks of vaccination prior to claiming the exemption.

Parents and guardians have two options to receive this education:

1. Talk to a health care practitioner. The practitioner can sign a Vaccine Education Certificate that the parent will submit to their child’s school or childcare, along with the child’s completed Certificate of Immunization Status.

2. View the online vaccine education module. The parent or guardian will print a Vaccine Education Certificate at the end of the module, to be turned into their child’s school or childcare, along with the child’s completed Certificate of Immunization Status.

The law also changes the language from “religious exemption” to “nonmedical exemption.” This change better encompasses the breadth of reasons why a parent or guardian may choose to claim an exemption.

When do these changes take effect?
March 1, 2014.

Who does the new law apply to?
The new process will apply to parents or guardians claiming nonmedical exemptions for:

- Children entering a childcare, preschool or Head Start program
- Children starting school for the first time, such as kindergarten
- Students who have never been in an Oregon school before
- Children whose exemptions change—for example, if a parent decides to exempt their child for an additional vaccine that was not previously on their record.

What documentation will parents turn into schools?
Parents will need to submit two pieces of documentation to the school to claim a nonmedical exemption:

1. Either a Vaccine Education Certificate signed by a health care practitioner or a Vaccine Education Certificate printed from the online educational module. These certificates show the vaccines that the parent received education about, and may therefore claim a nonmedical exemption for; and
2. A Certificate of Immunization Status (CIS), signed by the parent. The parent needs to mark each vaccine for which the nonmedical exemption is being claimed on this form. The parent may only mark vaccines on the CIS for which the parent has received education from a health care practitioner or online educational module.

**When will computerized student information systems be updated?**
School student information systems used for immunization tracking and reporting will be updated by September 1, 2014. Until the student information system is updated, school staff should input nonmedical exemptions into the religious exemption field, making sure to include the date of the signature for the nonmedical exemption (March 1, 2014, or after).

**Where will schools and childcares keep these certificates?**
The Vaccine Education Certificate documenting education from a health care practitioner or online module should be attached to the student’s Certificate of Immunization Status form. Maintain the documentation as you normally maintain immunization records.

**Where are the links to the online educational module and the certificate for a health care practitioner to sign?**
Links will be available March 1, 2014, at: www.healthoregon.org/vaccineexemption

**Do children in my school with a religious exemption on file need a nonmedical exemption on March 1, 2014?**
No, children in your school who submitted documentation of a religious exemption to you prior to March 1, 2014, do not need to complete the new process for claiming a nonmedical exemption unless the parent chooses an exemption for vaccines that were not previously exempted. This includes PreK children with religious exemptions if this is the entry level for your school.

**Are religious exemptions claimed in one school prior to March 1, 2014, valid if a student transfers to another school on or after March 1?**
Yes, religious exemptions claimed prior to March 1, 2014, in an Oregon school are valid in another Oregon school if the documentation is transferred to the new school.

**Are religious exemptions claimed in a childcare or Head Start prior to March 1, 2014, valid when a child enrolls in school on or after March 1?**
No, parents of students enrolling in school in Oregon for the first time on or after March 1, 2014, will need to complete the new process to claim a nonmedical exemption, even if a religious exemption was on file at a childcare or Head Start program previously.

**Why is this law important?**
Oregon has one of the highest exemption rates in the country. The annual rate of nonmedical exemptions for Oregon kindergartners has risen steadily from 2.4% in 2002 (first graders included) to 6.4% in 2013. Some counties in Oregon have kindergarten exemption rates as high as 15%, and some schools have exemption rates as high as 70%. This leaves communities vulnerable to diseases such as measles and pertussis.
Are health care practitioners required to provide vaccine education?
No. Health care practitioners can choose whether to provide education, or to refer parents and guardians to the online module.

What information is provided in the online vaccine education module?
What information will health care practitioners give to parents and guardians?
The online module discusses the benefits and risks of vaccination, the epidemiology, and the safety and efficacy of each school and childcare-required vaccine. Health care practitioners are required to provide information that is consistent with the information provided in the online module.

Will the vaccine education module be available in languages other than English?
Alternate formats will be available upon request. To request materials in an alternate format, call 971-673-0300.

Are there other changes in the law?
Yes, many of the changes were minor, such as requiring month, day and year for each vaccine, clarifying immunity documentation and changing the minimum age for Tdap down to age seven because of clinical recommendations. The major change is in regard to Hepatitis A vaccine requirements. Hepatitis A vaccine will continue to be required one additional grade at a time instead of requiring all students to have the Hepatitis A by school year 2014-2015.

Why was the Hepatitis A vaccine requirement phase-in schedule changed?
The Immunization School/Facility/College Law Advisory Committee, the group that makes recommendations to the Oregon Immunization Program about school immunization requirements, voted to recommend this change. They considered factors such as the timing conflict with the implementation of the new nonmedical exemption process and the high rates of Hepatitis A immunization in the upper grades (approximately 2/3 of adolescents have one or two doses of Hepatitis A vaccine according to data from ALERT IIS), thanks in large part to the efforts of schools to get adolescents vaccinated in preparation for the old phase-in schedule.

Other questions?
Please contact the Oregon Immunization Program at (971) 673-0300, or visit our school immunization website at http://1.usa.gov/OregonSchool