

IMMUNIZATIONS

AAFP Position

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) supports immunizations for infants, children, adolescents, and adults as defined by recommendations set forth in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). With the exception of policies allowing for refusal due to a documented allergy or medical contraindication, the AAFP does not support immunization exemption policies.

Vaccines and Exemptions

Immunizations are among the most cost-effective and successful public health interventions and can prevent much of the high morbidity and mortality associated with most vaccine-preventable diseases. An overwhelming [body of evidence](#) confirms that, despite parental concerns, there is no link between immunizations and autism in children.¹

All students attending public schools and universities and daycare facilities are required to receive certain childhood immunizations against many, often highly contagious, diseases, including measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR). States may allow parents the right to decline immunizations for their children based on medical conditions, religious, and/or personal beliefs. Medical [exemptions](#) to immunizations are allowed in all 50 states and DC. In addition, 45 states and DC allow parents to claim religious exemptions from vaccines for sincerely held religious beliefs. Philosophical exemptions in 16 states further broaden statutory language to allow for exemptions based on personal or conscientiously held beliefs.

State immunization programs conduct annual kindergarten vaccination assessments to monitor school entry vaccination coverage with all state-required vaccines. For the 2020-21 school year, coverage was approximately 94% for all required vaccines, approximately one percentage point lower than the previous school year. Fortunately, the overall percentage of children with an exemption remained low during the 2020-21 school year at 2.2%. Disruptions caused by COVID-19 reduced reported enrollment, school response rates, and documentation for the 2020–21 school year.²

Unvaccinated children are at increased risk of developing vaccine-preventable diseases. In fact, unvaccinated children are nearly six times more likely to contract pertussis and 22-35 times more

¹ Hviid A, Hansen JV, Frisch M, Melbye M. (2019). "Measles, Mumps, Rubella Vaccination and Autism: A Nationwide Cohort Study." *Ann Intern Med*. Web.

² Seither R, Laury J, Mugerwa-Kasujja A, Knighton CL, Black CL. Vaccination Coverage with Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten — United States, 2020–21 School Year. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2022;71:561–568. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7116a1>^{external icon}

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likely to contract measles.³⁴ In addition, persons who claim philosophical or religious exemptions create transmission risks for their community. States with no philosophical or religious exemptions have shown the lowest levels of vaccine-preventable diseases. In April of 2022, the CDC reported a [Meningitis outbreak](#) in Florida disproportionately affecting gay, bisexual, MSM, and/or those with a positive HIV status. In July of 2022, an adult in New York was diagnosed with polio, it was the first case in the United States in nearly a decade.

Childhood Vaccination During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a significant decrease in pediatric vaccine ordering and administration, actively putting U.S. children at increased risk for preventable diseases. These decreases can be attributed to increased public health prevention methods such as social distancing and telemedicine visits as well as an increase in vaccine hesitancy during the pandemic. During quarantine ordinances, medical care became increasingly inaccessible, especially for marginalized groups. Pandemic-era delays in medical care have influenced disruptions in vaccine timing. Since the start of the pandemic, vaccination rates have been the lowest among Black infants than in other racial and ethnic groups⁵.

A “pre” and “post” pandemic [surveillance study](#)⁶ of eight health systems in the United States demonstrated declines in vaccination rates from May to September 2020. From 2019 to 2020 the vaccination rate for 7-month-old infants dropped from 81% to 74%. According to the CDC, provider orders for non-influenza pediatric vaccines through the Vaccines for Children decreased by 11.7 million doses one year into the pandemic. Furthermore, on a global scale, since the Covid-19 pandemic started, [over 23 million children](#)⁷ have fallen behind schedule for essential vaccines. The AAFP firmly supports the maintenance of herd immunity by widespread childhood and adolescent vaccination and additionally supports healthcare provider efforts to counsel patients on vaccination administration. Family physicians have a unique relationship with their community, and in turn, can provide guidance for vaccine-hesitant parents, adhere to safety protocols, and offer curbside vaccination services, among other efforts to improve overall health and safety. Several providers have circumvented pandemic-age issues with vaccination schedule delays by opening “sick” and “well” offices and administering vaccinations at the patient’s vehicle.

State Funding of Immunizations and Relevant Legislation

From 1993 to 2018, vaccinating children [saved \\$408 billion](#)⁸ in direct medical cost. Although most states receive federal funding for the purchase of vaccines, they are not fully covered for all children. Some states adopted a [universal purchase policy](#)⁹ for public and private insurers in which the local government funds vaccines for all children, and in other states, a universal select program is utilized to purchase most, but not all vaccines for children.

³⁴Feikin D, Lezotte D, Hamman R. (2000). “Individual and Community Risks of Measles and Pertussis Associated with Personal Exemptions to Immunization.” *JAMA*. Web.

⁴Salmon D, Haber M, Gangarosa E. (1999). “Health Consequences of Religious and Philosophical Exemptions from Immunization Laws.” *JAMA*. Web.

⁵Malini B. DeSilva, MD, MPH¹; Jacob Haapala, MPH¹; Gabriela Vazquez-Benitez, PhD¹; et al. (2021). “Association of the COVID-19 Pandemic With Routine Childhood Vaccination Rates and Proportion Up to Date With Vaccinations Across 8 US Health Systems in the Vaccine Safety Datalink.” *JAMA*. Web.

⁶Malini B. DeSilva, MD, MPH¹; Jacob Haapala, MPH¹; Gabriela Vazquez-Benitez, PhD¹; et al. (2022). “Association of the COVID-19 Pandemic With Routine Childhood Vaccination Rates and Proportion Up to Date With Vaccinations Across 8 US Health Systems in the Vaccine Safety Datalink.” *JAMA*. Web.

⁷Murthy B, et al. (2021). “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Administration of Selected Routine Childhood and Adolescent Vaccinations – 10 US Jurisdictions, March–September.” *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Web.

⁸“Long-Term Payoff: An Economic Perspective on Immunization.” (2019). *AJMC*. Web.

⁹“State Immunization Policy Overview.” (2021). NCSL

After California passed [legislation](#) in 2015 to eliminate the state's religious and philosophical immunization exemptions, that state's [immunization rate](#) increased five points to an all-time high of 95.5 percent in 2017. To build on its success, the state passed [legislation](#) in 2019 to cut down on physician- and parent-driven abuse of the medical exemption process. In addition to California, five states (CT, ME, MS, NY, WV) limit vaccination exemptions to medical exemptions only. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence supporting the efficacy and safety of vaccines, states continue to introduce legislation to expand exemptions and require physicians to explain to patients the "risks" associated with immunizations.

Additional Sources

- 2022 CDC Recommended Child & Adolescent [Immunization Schedule](#)
- [AAFP](#) Immunizations & Vaccines Page
- [AAFP](#) Immunizations Policy Page
- [AAFP](#) COVID-19 Vaccine for Children and Adolescents
- [State School Immunization Requirements](#) and Vaccine Exemption Laws
- [AAP](#) Countering Vaccine Hesitancy
- [Covid-19 Vaccines](#) in Children and Adolescents
- [Childhood Immunization Coverage in US states](#): the impact of state policy interventions and programmatic support
- [Center for Children and Families](#) Urgent Action Needed to Catch Up on Routine Childhood Vaccinations
- [Family Physicians](#) Urge All Eligible Children and Adults to Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19
- [AAP Grand Rounds](#) Pediatric Immunization During the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Health Children Why Immunize Your Child [Toolkit](#)

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