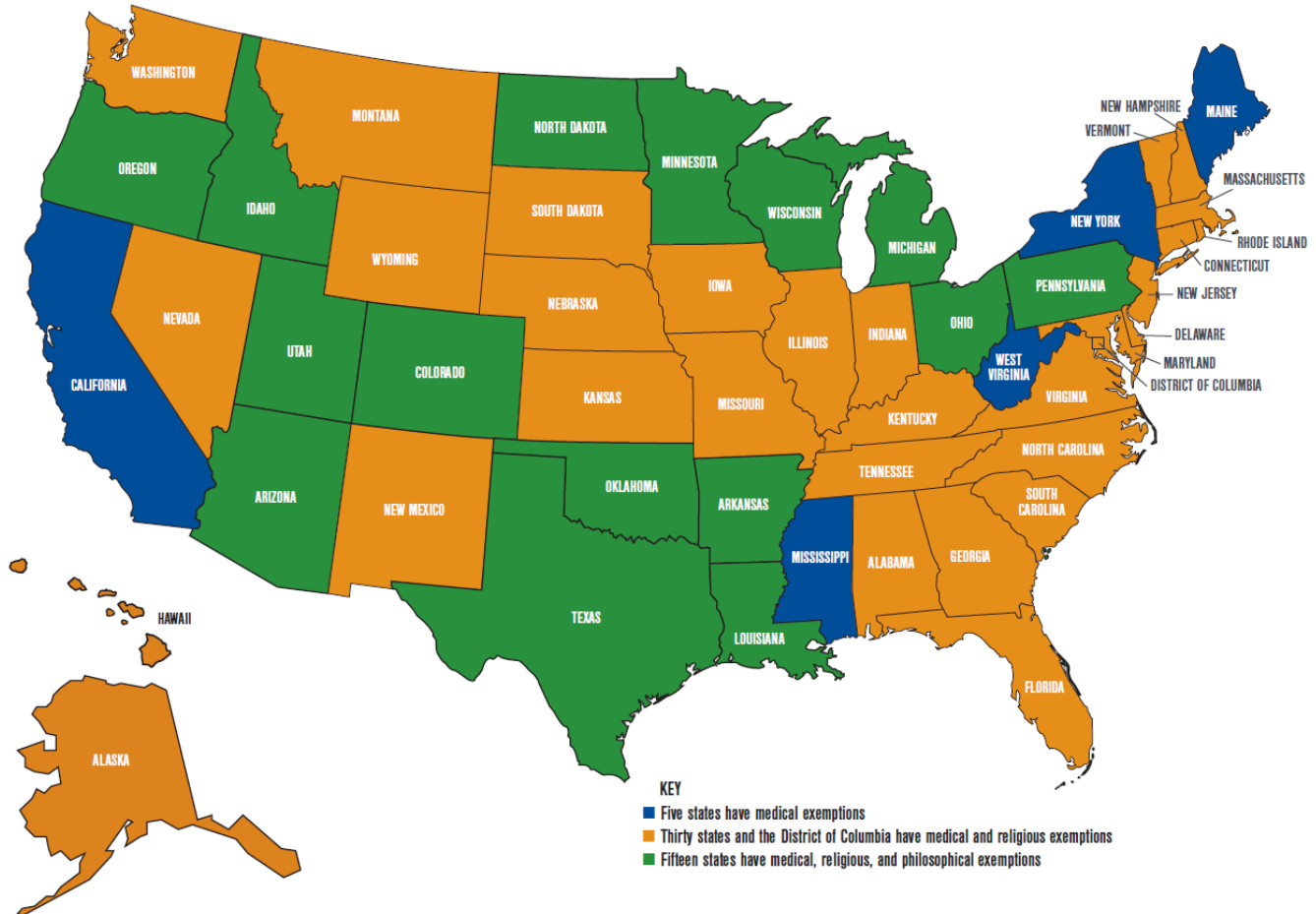




IMMUNIZATIONS



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. With the exception of policies allowing for refusal due to a documented allergy or medical contraindication, the AAFP does not support immunization exemption policies.

The Importance of Vaccines

Immunizations are among the most cost-effective and successful public health interventions. Due to the high morbidity and mortality associated with most vaccine-preventable diseases and the safety, effectiveness, and savings offered by vaccines, all states and DC have laws that require proof of immunization for school enrollment. An overwhelming body of evidence confirms that, despite parental concerns, there is no link between immunizations and autism in children.¹

¹ Hvid A, Hansen J, Frisch M, Melbye M. (2019). "Measles, Mumps, Rubella Vaccination and Autism." *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Web.

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Immunization Rates

More than 90 percent of children generally receive most recommended immunizations. For the 2017-18 academic year, Mississippi reported the highest immunization rates in the country, with approximately 99.4 percent of kindergarten students adequately immunized for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) – about five percentage points higher than the national vaccination medians of 94.3, 95.1, and 96.2 percent for these diseases, respectively. Oregon, which along with neighboring Washington state, reported a spike in measles cases in early 2019, had the highest percentage of nonmedical vaccine exemptions, at 7.5 percent of all kindergarteners. Nine states (AK, AZ, ID, ME, MI, OR, UT, WA, WI) and DC reported four percent or more of kindergarteners were exempted from vaccines due to religious or philosophical reasons.²

State Immunization Exemptions

States may allow parents the right to decline immunizations for their children based on medical, religious, and philosophical grounds. Medical exemptions are an exception to immunization mandates based upon a medical condition and are allowed in all 50 states. Most providers follow the CDC federal vaccine [recommendations](#) outlining what is and is not considered a medical contraindication to vaccination. Religious exemptions allow parents the right to forego vaccination for their child if vaccination would violate their sincerely held religious belief. Currently, 45 states and DC allow for religious exemptions for childhood vaccines. Philosophical exemptions in fifteen states further broaden statutory language beyond religious concerns to allow for exemptions based on personal or conscientiously held beliefs.

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 likely to contract measles.^{3,4} 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.⁵

State Legislative Activity

After California passed [legislation](#) in 2015 to eliminate the state's religious and philosophical immunization exemptions, that state's immunization rate reached an all-time high of 95.5 percent in 2017, nearly five percentage points higher than before law was passed.⁶ California is continuing to build on their vaccine rates and introduced [legislation](#) which would cut down on physician- and parent-driven abuse of the medical exemption process.

Recent measles outbreaks nationwide led [Washington state](#) to pass legislation to repeal its philosophical exemption for MMR and [Maine](#) and [New York](#) to remove all non-medical exemptions during the 2019 legislative session. Unfortunately, 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.

Updated: August 2019

² Mellerson J, Maxwell C, Knighton C, Kriss J, Seither R, Black C. (2018). "Vaccination Coverage for Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten – United States, 2017-18 School Year." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web.

³ Feikin D, Lezotte D, Hamman R. (2000). "Individual and Community Risks of Measles and Pertussis Associated with Personal Exemptions to Immunization." *JAMA*. Web.

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

⁵ Olive J, Hotez P. (2018). "The state of the antivaccine movement in the United States: A focused examination of nonmedical exemptions in states and counties." *PLOS Medicine*. Web.

⁶ California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch. (2018). "2017-2018 Kindergarten Immunization Assessment – Executive Summary." Web.