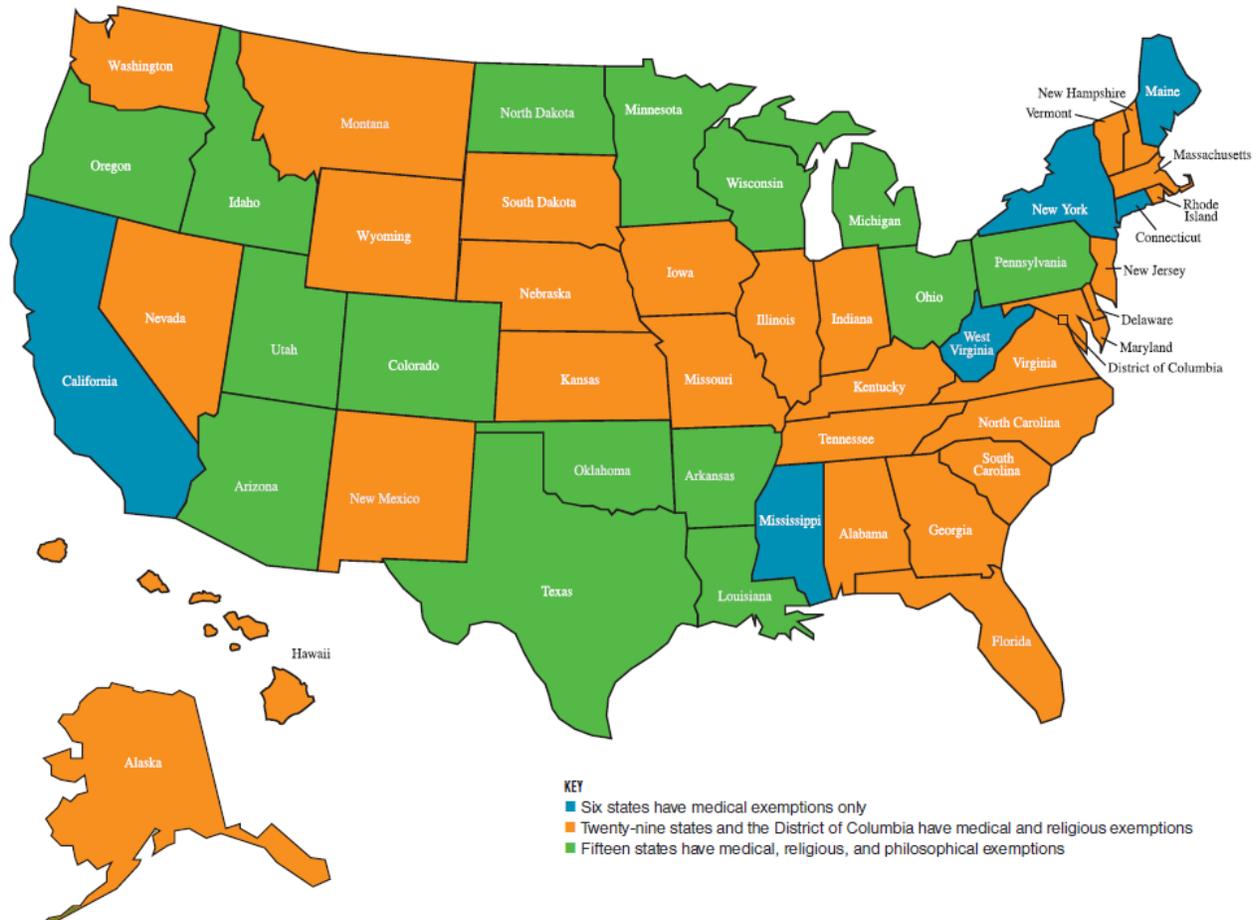




IMMUNIZATIONS



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.

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

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

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All students attending public schools and universities and day care 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, religious, and/or philosophical grounds. Medical [exemptions](#) to immunizations are allowed in all 50 states and DC. In addition, 29 states and DC allow parents to claim religious exemptions from childhood vaccines for sincerely held religious beliefs. Philosophical exemptions in 15 states further broaden statutory language to allow for exemptions based on personal or conscientiously held beliefs.

Approximately 95 percent of children receive most recommended immunizations. For the 2019-20 school year, 99.1 percent of Mississippi kindergarteners were adequately immunized for MMR, the highest rate in the country – about five percentage points higher than the national median. During that same year, nine states (AK, AZ, HI, ID, ME, OR, UT, WA, WI) [reported](#) five percent or more of kindergarteners exempt from vaccines, the highest being 7.6 percent of all Idaho kindergarteners.² The COVID-19 pandemic has further depressed childhood vaccination rates; for MMR immunizations, the decline exceeded 60 percent for children aged 2-8.³

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.^{4,5} 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.

State Legislative Activity

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.

COVID-19 Vaccine

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of immunizations and the role family physicians can play in increasing COVID-19 vaccination rates. Because of their existing relationships with patients, family physicians are trusted messengers who can address patients’ vaccine-related concerns and assuage fears. Despite the proven safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine, at least 30 states have introduced legislation to prohibit mandatory vaccination and/or COVID-19 vaccination status discrimination, including [Maryland](#). States have also introduced legislation that would prohibit schools from requiring students to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or acting against students who refuse vaccination, as seen in [Tennessee](#).

Updated: **July 2021**

²Seither R, McGill M, Kriss J, Mellerson J, Loretan C, Driver K, Knighton C, Black C. (2021). “Vaccination Coverage for Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten – United States, 2019-20 School Year.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web.

³ Murthy 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.

⁴ Feikin D, Lezotte D, Hamman R. (2000). “Individual and Community Risks of Measles and Pertussis Associated with Personal Exemptions to Immunization.” *JAMA*. Web.

⁵ Salmon D, Haber M, Gangarosa E. (1999). “Health Consequences of Religious and Philosophical Exemptions from Immunization Laws.” *JAMA*. Web.