

Frequently Asked Questions Vaccine Exemption for Reasons of Conscience

Q. *How do I obtain a vaccine exemption for reasons of conscience for my child?*

A. Parents or guardians need to request a vaccine exemption affidavit form in writing. Each child's name and date of birth must be included in the request. The requests must be submitted through the U.S. Postal Service, commercial carrier or fax to:

Mailing Address:

Department of State Health Services
Immunization Branch (MC 1946)
P.O. Box 149347
Austin, TX 78714-9347

Hand Deliver:

Department of State Health Services
Immunization Branch
1100 West 49th Street
Austin, TX 78756

Fax (512) 458-7544

Q. *What if I have already submitted a request for a vaccine exemption affidavit form by e-mail?*

A. Any request submitted by e-mail will need to be resubmitted in writing and sent through the U.S. Postal Service, commercial carrier or fax to the above address.

Q. *How many vaccine exemption affidavit forms can a parent or guardian request at one time?*

A. Parents or guardians can request up to five vaccine exemption affidavit forms per child.

Q. *What information will be listed on the vaccine exemption affidavit form I receive?*

A. Information on the form will include the child's name; date of birth; a list of vaccines for which exemptions may be requested; a statement for the requesting parent or guardian to indicate their relationship to the child; and an acknowledgement that the parent or guardian has read attached information entitled *The Benefits and Risks of Vaccinations*. Parents or guardians will then have to sign the form in front of a notary public.

Q. *What will happen to the information collected on each child?*

A. Requests submitted to DSHS will be returned to parents or guardians along with the vaccine exemption affidavit forms. DSHS will track and report on the number of affidavit requests and zip code. No other information will be maintained.

- Q. What should parents or guardians do with the vaccine exemption affidavit form?**
- A. After the original vaccine exemption affidavit form is signed and notarized, it must be submitted to the child's school.
- Q. For how long is each child's individual exemption affidavit valid?**
- A. Each individual vaccine exemption affidavit is good for two years from the date notarized.
- Q. What happens if the parent or school loses the original vaccine exemption affidavit?**
- A. Photocopies of the vaccine exemption affidavit form are not valid. If parents or schools lose the exemption affidavit, the parent or guardian needs to request another vaccine exemption affidavit in writing following the same procedures used to obtain the first form.
- Q. What if my child changes schools?**
- A. The vaccine exemption affidavit is part of the child's school records and should be sent to the new school with other school records.
- Q. Does a child have a 90-day provisional enrollment in school while awaiting the vaccine exemption form?**
- A. No. Admission to a school is not allowed until records are produced showing (1) that the child has been immunized in accordance with the rules; (2) the child has an exemption from immunization requirements on file with the school in accordance with the rules; or (3) that the child is entitled to provisional enrollment.
- Q. What is required for school enrollment if I want my child exempt from some vaccines but not all of them?**
- A. Two different immunization documents will be needed: 1) an official notarized DSHS vaccine exemption affidavit for those vaccines the parent or guardian has chosen for reasons of conscience to have their child exempt from; and 2) a valid immunization record indicating the month, date and year each vaccine for which the child is not exempt was administered, with appropriate validation by a physician or public health clinic.
- Q. If a child currently has a religious exemption for vaccinations on file with the school, do they need to obtain a new vaccine exemption for reasons of conscience affidavit?**
- A. No. Students who had religious exemptions filed at the school prior to September 1, 2003 do not need a new vaccine exemption affidavit form. The religious exemption on file remains valid.

- Q. What if there is a vaccine-preventable disease—such as measles—outbreak at a school?**
- A. Each parent or guardian who signs a vaccine exemption affidavit form also is acknowledging they understand that their child may be excluded from school attendance in times of emergency or epidemic declared by the Texas Commissioner of Health.
- Q. Does this new vaccine exemption option mean that my vaccinated child may be attending school with other children who are not fully vaccinated?**
- A. Yes.
- Q. Can an expectant parent request a vaccination exemption affidavit form for an unborn child?**
- A. No. Because the child's name and date of birth is required when the vaccine exemption affidavit form is requested, expectant parents must wait until after the child is born to request the vaccine exemption affidavit form.
- Q. Are there other reasons a child may be exempted from vaccination requirements?**
- A. A child may be exempt from one or more vaccinations for medical reasons. The parent or guardian must provide the school with a certificate signed by a physician, registered and licensed to practice medicine in Texas, which states that, in the physician's opinion, the immunization required would be injurious to the child's health and well-being or to any of the child's family or household members. Unless a lifelong condition is specified, that certificate is valid for one year from the date signed by the physician and must be renewed every year for the exclusion to remain in effect.