

Immunization Policy 411a

Any student entering a Catholic school in the Diocese of Wichita shall present to the Principal or designee official proof that he/she has completed, or is in the process of completing tests and inoculations as are deemed necessary by the Secretary the Kansas State Department of Health and Environment. Failure to have these tests and inoculations or complete them in a timely manner shall be deemed non-compliance, and schools may reserve the right to deny admittance. Before making a decision regarding school admittance, principals shall consult with the Superintendent of Catholic Schools.

Exemptions for Immunization State of Kansas

In the state of Kansas, government and school authorities may legally grant exemptions to immunization for two reasons: medical and religious.

Exemption for Immunization Catholic Diocese of Wichita

Medical Exemption: If a medical exemption is warranted, an annual KCI-FORM B Medical Exemption Form must be completed and signed by a Medical Doctor (M.D.) or Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.). Annual medical exemptions shall be documented on this form and attached to the student's Kansas Certificate of Immunizations (KCI) form. Annual medical exemptions must be completed as long as the medical exemption is warranted. Students with medical exemptions shall be permitted to attend school except in the case of a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak in the school.

Religious Exemption: Although the Catholic Church supports and encourages vaccinations, it is not a moral obligation imposed on every member of the Church. It must be voluntary, and not obligatory by mandate. The Diocese supports the rights of the parents to make informed medical decisions for their children. Therefore, the Catholic Diocese of Wichita grants the religious exemption to parents who choose not to vaccinate their children. This decision is based both on respecting the rights of parents in making health care decisions for their children and respecting the right for them to act according to their consciences. Annual religious exemption shall be documented on the official form for the Catholic Diocese. Students with religious exemptions shall be permitted to attend school except in the case of a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak in the school.

Catholic Diocese of Wichita Complete Statement on Immunization Exemptions

This complete statement on immunization exemptions is meant to clarify in lay terms the position of the greater Church and specifically this diocese with regard to the immunization of children who are enrolled in Catholic schools within the diocese. With this policy the Wichita Diocese joins in solidarity with the other three dioceses of the state of Kansas.

In recent years, there has been growing resistance on the part of some parents to have their children immunized. Reasons for this resistance typically fall into two categories: 1) Medical concerns and 2) Conscience concerns. Resistance for medical concerns, with some individual exceptions, generally is focused on concerns related to potential harmful effects of the vaccines and/or desires to minimize the use of pharmaceuticals as a matter of course. Conscience concerns are focused on the fact that certain vaccines are still derived from tissues of aborted babies, and/or in some circumstances those derived without a connection to abortion still test those vaccines with tainted lines.

The Church's Position on Medical Concerns

While there are differing opinions regarding the harmful effects and efficacy of vaccines, the prevailing opinion is that immunization, in general, is highly beneficial and has resulted in the reduction of disease and death among the population. The greater Church has expressed no issue to date with respect to the medical aspect of immunization, as the Church defers to experts in the medical and scientific fields on this topic. The Church staunchly supports sound medical research to improve treatment of disease as long as that research and any ultimate treatments are in keeping with the Church's moral teachings.

The Church does recognize the right of individuals to form prudential judgements with regard to healthcare decisions affecting themselves and their children. Yet in making such decisions, individuals must consider the common good, including the public health benefits of immunization. This theme of awareness on how decisions affect the larger community is a theme of the Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*. In summary, while some Catholics cite medical concerns for not immunizing their children, these are personal opinions and not the official position of the Church.

The Church's Position on Moral Concerns and a Well-Formed Conscience

The Church has grave concerns regarding the origins of certain vaccines. In particular, the Rubella and Chicken Pox vaccines are extremely problematic due to the fact that they were developed using material from aborted babies. However, Vatican and United States theologians have concluded that Catholics may licitly accept vaccination for themselves and their children using a vaccine based on tissue from abortion or may refuse the vaccine "if it can be done without causing children, and indirectly the population as a whole, to undergo significant risks to their health." (Conscience Exemption for Vaccines based on Fetal Tissue from Abortions, Secretariat of Pro-life Activities, Released April 2007, Updated April 2015).

This conclusion was based on two considerations: 1) Some of these vaccines contain material from a strain that was developed in the past and no new aborted material is used 2) The potential danger to current unborn babies and young children from a population of unvaccinated persons may counterbalance the concern regarding the origin of the vaccines, particularly when considering that the individual who receives the tainted vaccination is not compliant in the abortion from which the vaccine was derived.

The Church strongly urges those individuals who do accept such vaccines to do so “under protest”, by actively voicing objection to the manufactures of such vaccine and also actively lobbying for the production of morally-derived products.

The Church also teaches that, presuming a properly formed conscience, “... man is obligated to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 1778). Thus, the Catholic Diocese of Wichita grants the religious exemption to parents who choose not to vaccinate on the basis of honoring the conscience right of parents. The exemption is in keeping with the recommendations of the Secretariat of Pro-life Activities of the United States Conference of the Catholic Bishops that states, “...diocesan institutions show a willingness to grant the exemption along the lines recommended by the Vatican Pontifical Academy for Life. In particular, in an area where public schools are granting a conscience exemption, based on the view of the public health authorities that doing so does not pose a serious risk to the population, Catholic institutions should be willing to do so as well.” (Conscience Exemption for Vaccines based on Fetal Tissue from Abortions).

Exclusion from School due to Vaccine-Preventable Disease Outbreak

Under Section 72-6262 of the Kansas Statute, children with medical exemptions or religious exemptions shall be permitted to attend school except in the case of a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak in the school or exposure to a vaccine-preventable disease. Students excluded from school will not be able to return to school until the danger of the outbreak has passed, as determined by local public health officials, or the student has been immunized.

Exclusion Periods for Common Vaccine-Preventable Diseases ranges from twenty-one days to twenty-eight days.