

# INFORMATION

from Focus on the Family

## HPV Vaccination: Parental Option for Exemption

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### Introduction

Although Focus on the Family supports the widely accepted practice of routine immunization against preventable diseases, we also recognize that parents may rightfully decide *not* to immunize their children for a number of reasons. This may especially be the case with the newly developed human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine designed to prevent a virus that is exclusively sexually transmitted.

On June 29, 2006 the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended that all 11- and 12-year-old girls be routinely vaccinated against HPV, which is the cause of most cervical cancer. This recommendation by a federal advisory group that cooperates with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) clears the way for states to mandate the HPV vaccine for public school entry.

Focus on the Family **supports** widespread (universal) availability of HPV vaccines but **opposes** mandatory HPV vaccinations for entry to public schools. We uphold parents' rights to decide if they will vaccinate their minor children. (To learn about the vaccine and make informed decisions for your family, see our Web page "HPV Vaccines: Information from Focus on the Family" at <http://www.citizenlink.org/hpv>.)

If states choose to make this vaccine mandatory, parental option for exemption still exists in most states.

### Exemptions

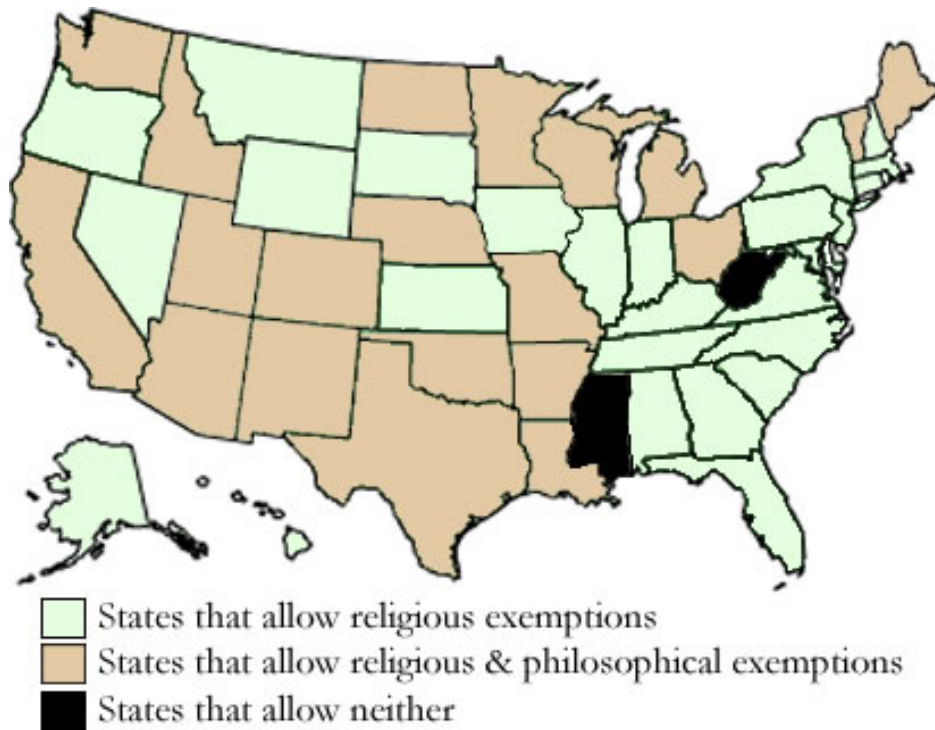
After carefully considering the issue, if a parent decides not to immunize their child, he or she may be required by their state to apply for an exemption. Exemption availability and options vary state-by-state but most often can be granted for medical, religious or philosophical reasons. Parents who wish to elect exemption should ask their doctor, county health department or state health department how to do so.

According to the National Network for Immunization Information, all 50 states allow vaccination exemptions for *medical reasons*. In addition, 48 states currently allow exemptions for *religious reasons* – 20 of which allow exemptions for non-religious *philosophical reasons* as well. The National Network defines these exemptions as follows<sup>1</sup>:

**“Medical exemptions** are determined by a physician. These may occur when a child is allergic to some vaccine components or has an immune deficiency, such as occurs when being treated for cancer.” [All states allow this in necessary instances.]

**“Religious exemptions** are allowed when immunizations contradict the parent’s sincere religious beliefs.” [The two states that do *not* currently allow for religious exemptions are Mississippi and West Virginia; the only exemption in these states is medical.]

**“Philosophical exemptions** refer to other non-religious beliefs held by the parents who do not believe that their child should be immunized.” [Currently, the 20 states that allow philosophical exemptions are as follows: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.]



Making the decision to immunize children against human papillomavirus, in particular, can be a complicated issue for parents. Focus on the Family supports parents in making the best decisions for *their* children.

### Additional Resources

**Focus on the Family- HPV Vaccines:** Information from Focus on the Family  
(*includes resources specifically for parents*)  
<http://www.citizenlink.org/hpv>

**Focus on the Family- Vaccine Safety:** A position statement of the Physicians Resource Council  
[http://family.org/sharedassets/correspondence/pdfs/Miscellaneous/Vaccine\\_Safety.pdf](http://family.org/sharedassets/correspondence/pdfs/Miscellaneous/Vaccine_Safety.pdf)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Vaccines & Immunizations:**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/node.do/id/0900f3ec8000e2f3>

**National Network for Immunization Information:**  
<http://www.immunizationinfo.org>

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<sup>i</sup> National Network for Immunization Information, "Immunization Policy Exemptions from Immunization Laws," [http://www.immunizationinfo.org/immunization\\_policy\\_detail.cfv?id=44#2](http://www.immunizationinfo.org/immunization_policy_detail.cfv?id=44#2) (June 20, 2006).

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