

Nonmedical Waiver Rule for Childhood Immunizations: Information for Schools and Childcare Programs

In early 2015, Michigan instituted an administrative rule change on nonmedical waivers for childhood immunizations. Parents/guardians seeking to obtain a nonmedical immunization waiver for their child/children who are enrolled in school or licensed childcare programs are required to attend an educational session, where they are provided with information about vaccine-preventable diseases and vaccinations.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why is this rule important?

Michigan has one of the highest immunization waiver rates in the country, with select counties reporting waiver rates over 10% (that is 1 out of 10 school-aged students that have not received all vaccinations required for school)¹. In addition, individual school buildings have reported even higher waiver rates. High nonmedical waiver rates can leave communities susceptible to diseases such as measles, chickenpox, and pertussis (whooping cough) by undermining community or “herd” immunity. Herd immunity protects vulnerable children who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons and children with compromised immune systems. Herd immunity can also slow the spread of disease if a high proportion of individuals in that community are immune to the disease. Immunization is one of the most effective ways to protect children from serious diseases and even death.

Who does this rule apply to?

The rule applies to parents/guardians seeking a nonmedical immunization waiver for their child/children who are enrolling in a public or private:

- Licensed childcare, preschool, and Head Start programs
- Kindergarten, 7th grade, and any newly enrolled student into the school district

What did the rule change?

Parents/guardians seeking to claim a nonmedical waiver are required to participate in an immunization-focused discussion with county health department staff. During the discussion, parents/guardians can bring up any immunization-related questions and/or concerns they may have. The staff will present evidence-based information regarding the risks of vaccine-preventable diseases and the benefits/potential risks (risks consisting mostly of moderate side effects) of vaccination. This rule preserves the ability of parents/guardians to obtain a nonmedical waiver following the completion of this required educational session.

What is a nonmedical immunization waiver?

A nonmedical waiver is a written statement by parents/guardians describing their religious or philosophical (other) objections to specific vaccine/vaccines. An official State of Michigan Nonmedical Waiver Form will be provided by the county health department.

¹ MDHHS unpublished data

*County Health Department includes the City of Detroit

How does this rule affect Michigan's schools and licensed childcare programs?

- The rule requires schools and childcare programs to refer parents/guardians seeking a nonmedical waiver for immunizations to the county health department for immunization waiver education and waiver certification.
- Schools and childcare programs can only accept a current, un-altered, certified State of Michigan Immunization Waiver Form.

What is considered a certified nonmedical waiver?

A certified nonmedical waiver is the State of Michigan Immunization Waiver Form. Any new waivers issued should have the revision date of January 1, 2019. A certified nonmedical waiver will:

- Display the county health department's information/stamp
- Include the child's: name, date of birth, address, name of school/childcare program, telephone number (optional), vaccines being waived with the reason, signed date, as well as signatures of the parent/guardian and of the county health department authorizing agent completing the immunization education

A county health department will not issue a waiver without both signatures, as it would be considered an incomplete and invalid waiver.

Waiver forms that are altered in any fashion (including information on the form that may be crossed out) or forms that are not an official MDHHS certified waiver form cannot be accepted by schools/childcare programs.

Can a parent/guardian obtain a certified nonmedical waiver form from a school, childcare program, or healthcare provider?

No, a certified State of Michigan nonmedical waiver can only be obtained at a county health department.

How does a parent/guardian obtain a certified nonmedical waiver?

Based on the rule, parents/guardians are no longer permitted to submit an uncertified Immunization Waiver Form to the school or childcare program attended by their child/children. Parents/guardians are required to:

1. Contact their county health department to receive immunization waiver education and to obtain a certified State of Michigan Immunization Waiver Form.
2. Submit the certified State of Michigan Immunization Waiver Form to the school or childcare program attended by their child/children.
3. Waiver forms that are altered in any fashion (including information on the form that may be crossed out) cannot be accepted by schools or childcare programs.

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What if a child has a medical contraindication to a vaccine?

The rule change did not affect the healthcare provider completing the medical contraindication form. A current State of Michigan Medical Contraindication Form (available at doctors' offices) must be completed and signed by a physician and submitted to the school or childcare program.

What documentation are parents/guardians required to submit to the school or childcare program attended by their child/children?

Parents/guardians are required to submit:

- A complete immunization record **or**
- A physician (MD/DO)-signed State of Michigan Medical Contraindication Form **or**
- A current, certified State of Michigan Nonmedical Immunization Waiver Form

Students without a completed immunization record and/or a certified waiver form are subject to exclusion from school or childcare unless the student is in a "provisional" category. Children in the provisional category are defined as those who have received 1 or more doses of vaccine but need to wait the recommended time to receive the next dose.

¹ MDHHS unpublished data

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