

Frequently Asked Questions

AB 2109 (Pan) Personal Belief Exemptions

What will this bill [AB 2190 (Pan)] do?

This bill would require that a parent or guardian who wants to exempt their child from school or childcare immunization requirements to first receive information from a licensed healthcare provider about the benefits and risks of vaccinations and the risks of vaccine preventable diseases. The provider would sign a standardized form (created by the California Department of Public Health) that a parent or guardian would also sign, and then turn in to the school or child care facility.

In lieu of using a standardized form, the parent or guardian may write and sign a letter verifying that they had received the same information (above). The provider may also sign a separate letter with the same information verifying that they have given the information to the parent or guardian.

Why do we need this law?

Personal belief exemptions (PBE) from immunization are easy to obtain and are on the rise in California. In 2000, the PBE rate was under 1% and as of 2010 the number is up to nearly 2.5%. Over the past two years, the number of children entering Kindergarten without receiving some or all of the required vaccinations has risen by 25%.

If the PBE rate continues to rise, more children will be at risk for catching and spreading vaccine-preventable diseases and community immunity will be impacted. This means that all of us will become more vulnerable to diseases - those who choose not to vaccinate and those who cannot be vaccinated because they are too young or for medical reasons.

Children who have not been vaccinated pose a risk to both the individual child and to others in their schools and community. It is important to make sure that parents have all the information to make an informed decision about vaccinating their children.

What is the current law and process for obtaining a personal belief exemption for immunization?

Parents or guardians who decline to have their children receive one or more required immunizations because of their personal beliefs may sign an affidavit (statement) on the back of the child's California School Immunization Record (the blue card) to receive an exemption to the associated requirements.

To protect themselves and others from spreading disease, children may be excluded from school during an outbreak of a disease against which they are not fully immunized.

Most children with exemptions have received at least some of the required vaccines. All immunizations that have been given to children (with or without exemptions) should be recorded on the CSIR. Schools and public health departments need this information to promptly protect students and the community when outbreaks occur.

What other exemptions does California law provide?

Children with certain medical conditions may receive temporary or permanent medical exemptions if authorized by their physicians.

Frequently Asked Questions

AB 2109 (Pan) Personal Belief Exemptions

Children who have already had the diseases of measles, mumps, rubella or chickenpox may receive exemptions from the associated vaccines if authorized by their physicians.

What does the provider form or letter have to include?

The provider form or letter must include a statement that indicates that the parent or guardian received information on the benefits and risks of immunizations and the risk of diseases that vaccines prevent. The provider form or letter must also reference the child's name, date and be signed by an authorized health care provider. A form or letter would also have a parent or guardian signature.

Won't this be a burden on physicians and their staff?

Healthcare providers often discuss immunizations with parents during routine well-child exams, starting from birth. If a parent has decided to exempt their child from vaccines required for childcare or school entry, they can discuss it during a regularly scheduled visit or they can make a separate appointment. In California, children are required to have a physical exam before registering for Kindergarten and that is an ideal time to discuss immunizations and other concerns with a health care provider.

Since 97% of families in California choose to immunize their children, this bill will affect a small percentage of families in a given practice.

What if a child does not have a doctor?

The bill identifies licensed Medical Doctors (MD's), Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DO's), Nurse Practitioners (NP's), and Physician Assistants (PA's) and Naturopaths working under a licensed physician, as those who are authorized to sign a standardized form or write a letter. Parents or guardians usually have these conversations with their child's physician during routine children's physical examinations.

Local health departments can direct families to local community clinics, health centers or school health centers that have health care providers who can provide information on immunization benefits and risks.

Would parents have to redo an exemption from previous years?

No. If a child's parent or guardian has signed the California School Immunization Record exempting their child from immunizations prior to any changes in the law taking effect, that exemption is still valid. However, as a child progresses through school or changes schools, a parent or guardian may need to fill out a new form or submit a letter or affidavit to meet age- appropriate requirements.

If most children are vaccinated already, why should we worry about a small number of unvaccinated children?

High vaccine coverage, particularly at the community level, is extremely important for children who cannot be vaccinated, including infants who are too young to be vaccinated, children who have medical contraindications to vaccination, individuals who have weakened immune systems and the elderly.

Frequently Asked Questions

AB 2109 (Pan) Personal Belief Exemptions

Protecting the individual and the community from communicable diseases such as measles, mumps, pertussis, is a core function of public health.

Health care providers should not have anything to do with approving exemptions for religious beliefs.

Providers are not-approving immunization exemption requests for personal beliefs, including those for religious reasons. Whether a parent or guardian is requesting an immunization exemption for personal or religious beliefs, providers and parents are only signing (acknowledging) they that they have provided the information and received the information about the benefits and risks of vaccines and the risks of vaccine-preventable diseases.