
AB 2109 (Pan)

Immunization: Vaccine Education

Fact Sheet

Problem/Background:

California is one of 20 states that allows for the broad use of the Personal Belief Exemption (PBEs) from immunizations that are required for children to enter school. In California, obtaining a personal belief exemption is simple — parents are only required to sign their name to a 2-sentence standard exemption statement on the back of the California School Immunization Record ('the blue card') or provide a signed written statement.

Over the past decade, the number of parents choosing to exempt their children from school immunization requirements has increased significantly. The number of kindergartens with 10 or more students enrolled that have personal belief exemptions has more than tripled over the past decade. Based on 2010 research data from the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Education and the US Census, California had about 11,500 kindergartners with personal belief exemptions, representing a 25% increase over the previous 2 years. The 2010 Kindergarten Assessment Report which monitors compliance with the California School Immunization Law, identifies the overall total of kindergarten entrants with a personal believe exemption at 2.33% with a range of 0% in Alpine County to nearly 18% in Nevada County. Over 30% of California Counties had exemption rates over 5%. This leaves more children at risk for catching and spreading vaccine-preventable diseases.

The continued increase in personal belief exemptions and resultant decreases in community immunization rates in California will result in outbreaks of diseases such as measles, mumps, and pertussis (whooping cough). Exposure to these preventable diseases not only places the individual child at risk, but the entire community, including infants too young to be fully immunized and individuals with compromised immune systems.

Parents have the right to make informed choices about immunizations for their children. However, these choices should not be based on misinformation or lack of information. Parents should be fully informed and understand the potential risks involved.

Solutions:

AB 2109 (Pan) would require a parent or guardian seeking a personal belief exemption for their child to obtain a document signed by themselves and a licensed health care practitioner. The document will state that the health care practitioner has informed the parent or guardian of the benefits and risks of the immunization, as well as the health risks of the diseases that a child could contract.

This bill preserves a parent's option to exempt their child from immunizations, but also ensures that such a decision is an informed one and that the parent is aware of the individual and public health risks of not immunizing their child.

Key Points

- A majority of parents believe immunizations are important and trust their health care provider as an authoritative and trusted source of information.
- Parent's questions are important and they deserve to have reliable information to support the healthcare decisions they make for their family.
- Children who are exempted from vaccine are at significant risk for diseases.
- Diseases can spread quickly in schools and child care facilities. It is important that all children are protected against preventable diseases.
- Public health officials want to ensure that requests for exemptions from immunization are based on conviction, not convenience.
- Proposed changes to current personal belief exemption (PBE) language would not take away a parent's right to exempt their child from immunizations.
- Proposed changes to the current statute would not impact exemptions for medical reasons.
- Proposed changes to the current statute would not change current vaccine recommendations for school or child care entry.
- There are numerous surveillance systems that monitor vaccine safety and effectiveness of vaccines.

For additional information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/vaccines

California Department of Public Health Immunization Program

www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo

Immunization Action Coalition

www.immunize.org

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