



PIDS releases position statement on immunization exemptions

The Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society recently issued a position statement that “opposes any legislation or regulation that would allow children to be exempted from mandatory immunizations based simply on their parents’, or in the case of adolescents, their own, secular personal beliefs.”

In the statement, **Christopher J. Harrison, MD**, of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS), and others, including *Infectious Diseases in Children* Editorial Board member **Paul A. Offit, MD**, said any legislation being considered should contain certain provisions; notably, that parents who are claiming exemptions be given counseling about the importance of [immunization](#) to their own child, as well as the community overall, and that parents would have to sign a statement that they understand the risks of not immunizing their child.



Paul A. Offit

“Hundreds of thousands of deaths have been prevented through routine immunizations and tens of billions of dollars have been saved, making childhood immunizations one of the most cost-effective components of our public health system,” according to the position paper.

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But fraudulent scientific data and surrounding media and celebrity hype has led to a pushback against vaccination, according to the statement. In some cases, this has led to a resurgence of some diseases, including the most [recent measles outbreak](#).

Although some patients have adverse reactions, vaccines are still the best protection against these potentially life-threatening diseases, according to the statement.

“Even a small number of unimmunized individuals in a community can facilitate the spread of disease,” according to the statement. The risk for measles is 35 times greater for an exempt child than a vaccinated one, 23 times higher for pertussis and nine times higher for varicella.

PIDS takes particular issue with states that allow exemptions based on secular beliefs. All states allow children who have medical contraindications to vaccination to be exempted. Most states also allow exemption based on religious beliefs, although there is variability in the rigor with which such beliefs must be proved or documented, the paper states.

“Some states allow for exemption based on the secular personal beliefs of the parents. However, states do not allow religious or personal belief exemption from other laws or regulations designed to protect children,” according to the statement.

According to the position statement, not having a child vaccinated just because a parent does not believe in it is similar to not using a car seat: These laws exist for the overall better welfare of children.

Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society. A statement regarding personal belief exemption from immunization mandates. Available at: www.pids.org/images/stories/pdf/pids-pbe-statement.pdf. Accessed April 14, 2011.

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