

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



In early 2015, Michigan instituted an administrative rule change on nonmedical waivers for childhood immunizations. Parents/guardians seeking to obtain a nonmedical immunization waiver on behalf of their child/children who are enrolled in school or licensed child-care 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 some counties reporting waiver rates up to 12.5% (that is, more than 12% of school-age students in these places have not received all vaccinations). In addition, individual school buildings have reported even higher waiver rates. High nonmedical waiver rates can leave communities susceptible to the entry of diseases such as measles, chickenpox, and pertussis (whooping cough) by undermining community or “herd” immunity that protects vulnerable children (for example, 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 are immune to the disease in a community. Immunization is one of the most effective ways to protect children from harmful diseases and even death.

What does 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, immunization-related questions and concerns of parents/guardians can be brought up for discussion with the county health department staff. The staff will present evidence-based information regarding the risks of vaccine-preventable diseases and the benefits/risks (mostly moderate side-effects) of vaccination. This rule preserves the ability of parents/guardians to obtain a nonmedical waiver following 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, on a form provided by the county health department.

How does this rule affect Michigan’s schools and licensed childcare centers?

- The rule requires schools and child care centers 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 centers can only accept a current, certified State of Michigan Immunization Waiver Form.

Who does this rule apply to?

The rule applies to parents seeking an immunization waiver on behalf of their children who are enrolling in a public or private:

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

What is considered a certified nonmedical waiver?

A certified nonmedical waiver is the State of Michigan Immunization Waiver Form with a revision date of January 1, 2016, displaying the county health department stamp and signatures of the authorizing agent completing the immunization education and the parent/guardian.

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

No, a certified 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 child-care center 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 child-care center attended by their child/children.
3. Waiver forms that are altered in any fashion (for example, information on the form is crossed out) cannot be accepted by schools or child-care centers.

What documentation are parents/guardians required to submit (to the school or child-care center attended by their child/children)?

Parents/guardians are required to submit a current, certified nonmedical immunization waiver form and/or completed immunization record. Students without a completed immunization record and/or a certified waiver form are subject to exclusion from school or childcare, unless student is in a “provisional” category. (Provisional is defined as a child who has received 1 or more doses of vaccine, however they need to wait the recommended time to receive the next dose)

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

This rule does not change the existing process for medical contraindications to vaccination. A current State of Michigan Medical Contraindication Form (available at doctors’ offices, not county health departments) must be completed and signed by a physician and submitted to the school or child-care center.

Will the schools/childcare centers need to document the certified nonmedical waiver into the Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR) under the School Immunization Record Keeping System (SIRS)?

Yes, the school or childcare center will need to:

1. Enter (record) the certified nonmedical waiver into SIRS.
2. Send a copy of the certified nonmedical waiver to the county health department with the immunization report and waiver report.
3. Maintain the certified nonmedical waiver form on file with immunization records.