

Immunization Rules for Claiming Nonmedical or Medical Waivers for Immunizations: Information for Healthcare Providers

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 child-care programs are required to attend an educational session, where they are provided with information about vaccine-preventable diseases and vaccinations.

The rule change does not affect the current process where the healthcare provider completes the medical waiver.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is this rule change important?

Michigan has one of the highest immunization waiver rates in the country, with select counties reporting waiver rates up to 10% (that is 1 out of 10 school aged students that have not received all school required vaccinations)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.

What is the difference between a medical and a nonmedical waiver?

- A **medical waiver** is a signed statement from the physician indicating that the child cannot receive a certain vaccine due to a true contraindication, or precaution to the vaccine or a vaccine component.
- A **nonmedical waiver** is a parent/guardian’s written statement indicating the religious or philosophical (other) objection to the vaccine(s).

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, 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

¹ MDHHS unpublished data

*County Health Department Includes the City of Detroit

rule preserves the ability of parents/guardians to obtain a nonmedical waiver following the completion of this required educational session.

Why does the rule for claiming a nonmedical waiver remove the healthcare provider from issuing the nonmedical waiver to the parent/guardian?

The rule is not intended to diminish the role of healthcare providers in educating parents and families on the importance of immunization. A strong provider recommendation is recognized as a powerful motivator for parents to comply with immunization recommendations.

The rule forms a partnership between public health and private healthcare providers in a joint effort to decrease the number of school and daycare waivers in Michigan. Ideally, by having providers educate the parent/guardian on true medical contraindications and the county health department offer additional education on the risks of vaccine-preventable disease and benefits of vaccinations, we will see an increase in immunization rates.

Who does the nonmedical waiver rule apply to?

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

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

How does the healthcare provider handle a request from the parent/guardian to receive a nonmedical waiver form?

Healthcare providers are expected to:

1. Educate the parent/guardian about the risks of disease and benefits of vaccination.
2. Document refusals to vaccinate by having the parent/guardian fill out a Refusal to Consent to Vaccination form found at: www.michigan.gov/immunize > click on *Local Health Departments* > click on *Immunization Waiver Information*.
3. Refer all nonmedical waiver requests to the county health department for the parent/guardian to receive a certified nonmedical waiver form.
 - a. The nonmedical waiver form needs to be a certified State of Michigan, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Immunization Waiver Form.

How does the healthcare provider handle a medical contraindication to a vaccine?

A current State of Michigan Medical Contraindication Form must be completed and signed by a physician.

Healthcare providers will need to:

1. Determine if there is a true medical contraindication or precaution to a vaccine.
 - a. A good resource is the Guide to Contraindications and Precautions to Commonly Used Vaccines, which is posted online at: www.michigan.gov/immunize > click on *Local Health Departments* > click on *Immunization Waiver Information*.

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2. If a true contraindication or precaution to a vaccine is present, complete the current State of Michigan Medical Contraindication Form.
 - a. The Medical Contraindication form is posted online at: www.michigan.gov/immunize > click on *Local Health Departments* > click on *Immunization Waiver Information*.
3. Give the Medical Contraindication Form to the parent/guardian to be turned into the school or childcare program (be sure to keep a copy for your files).

Note: If the child is in the dose waiting (provisional) period, a medical waiver is not necessary.

Will the healthcare provider need to document the non-administered vaccine into the Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR)?

Yes, the healthcare provider will need to:

1. Record the non-administered vaccine into MCIR indicating “medical” as the reason.
2. Maintain the Medical Contraindication form on file in the medical record system being used in the provider’s office.

What happens if these specific waiver forms (listed above) are not used?

Only the current versions of the State of Michigan Medical Contraindication Form or Nonmedical Waiver form can be accepted by schools and/or childcare programs. Additional waiver forms or the official State of Michigan forms that have been altered in any way cannot be accepted by schools or childcare programs. Students who do not comply with submitting proper forms are to be excluded from school or childcare unless they are in the dose waiting (provisional) period.

¹ MDHHS unpublished data

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