

## Immunization Policy for Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Omaha

In Nebraska, children cannot attend classes in public or private school until the school has written proof of their immunization status (Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 79-217 through 79-223).

### **General Rule**

To attend school, children in Nebraska are required to be immunized against the following diseases:

- Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis [DTaP, DTP, DT or Td vaccine]
- Polio
- Measles, mumps, and rubella [MMR or MMRV]
- Hepatitis B
- Chicken pox [MMRV or Varicella]
- Tdap (7th grade)

Each school in Nebraska is required to keep the immunization history of the students enrolled on file. In addition, schools are required to report information on student's immunization status annually to the Nebraska Immunization Program. School reporting is conducted on-line via survey, and the deadline is November 15 of each year.

These statutes of the State of Nebraska, because of the religious exemptions provided and their intent to safeguard individuals and the public from harm, conform to the Church's teaching regarding the common good. The Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Omaha will follow these state requirements.

### **Exemptions**

Nebraska does allow for two types of exemptions: Medical and Religious.

**The Medical Exemption** requires "a statement signed by a physician, a physician assistant, or an advanced practice registered nurse . . . stating that, in the health care provider's opinion, the required immunization would be injurious to the health and well-being of the student or any member of the student's family or household." A model form for this exemption is attached to this policy. Forms signed by a health care provider which simply state the parents do not feel it is in the best interests of the child are not sufficient to satisfy the medical exemption. The health care provider must indicate on the form used that the vaccine(s) in question are "injurious to the health and well-being of the student or any member of the student's family or household." The term "physician" means an individual licensed under the Nebraska Medicine and Surgery Practice Act to practice medicine and surgery or osteopathic medicine and surgery; the term "physician" does not include a chiropractor.

**The Religious Exemption** requires "an affidavit signed by the student, or if he or she is a minor, a legally authorized representative of the student stating that the immunization conflicts with the tenets and practice of a recognized religious denomination of which the student is an adherent or member or that the immunization conflicts with the personal and sincerely followed religious beliefs of the student." For those who seek a religious exemption, the Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Omaha will require that the parents indicate the religious denomination of the student in question.

Immunizations do not conflict with the “tenets and practice recognized” by the Catholic Church. Catholics are however obliged to avoid vaccines derived from cell lines from aborted fetuses when there are alternatives available to them. Alternatives to such vaccines are available in the United States for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and hepatitis b. A list with the names of those alternative vaccines is attached to this policy.

Unfortunately, there are no alternatives currently available in the United States for the vaccines for Rubella and chickenpox which have been derived from cell lines from aborted fetuses. Because of the grave harm that can be caused by these diseases and because of the lack of alternatives, it is morally licit for a Catholic to use these vaccines, and it is recommended by the Archdiocese of Omaha that students submit to these vaccinations for the sake of the common good. A statement explaining the Church’s teaching regarding the common good and vaccines can be found as an appendix to this policy.

Nevertheless, though morally licit and despite the potential harm to the common good, a Catholic may, in good conscience, submit a religious exemption for those vaccines which contain the rubella and the chickenpox vaccines: (MMR, MMRV and varicella) and the Catholic Schools will honor that limited exemption request. Catholics may not submit a religious exemption for any of the other vaccines. A model affidavit for this exemption request is attached to this policy.

The Archdiocese of Omaha interprets the phrase “the personal and sincerely followed religious beliefs” to refer to conscientious objections founded on religious belief. For Catholics, religious belief comes from the teachings of the Church as transmitted and interpreted by the magisterium. Therefore, while those who object to vaccines based on medical opinion may have deeply held conscientious objections, theirs is not a “religious belief.” For this reason, they may seek a medical exemption, as indicated above, if the vaccines cause harm, but they do not qualify for a religious exemption.

Students who have been granted an exemption may need to be excluded from school if there is an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease. The school is not required to modify services for a student who has been excluded due to an outbreak. The period of exclusion shall be no less than the minimum isolation period for that disease and when all signs or symptoms of acute illness have disappeared. The period of exclusion should extend throughout the period when acute signs of illness are present, or until the student is fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication. Minimum isolation periods are shown in the table attached to this policy.

If a student cannot provide a proper medical or religious exemption, the student may not attend any of the Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Omaha without proof of the required immunization.

All Catholics are encouraged to formally object to the way the unethical vaccines are created and to the lack of alternatives. A model objection form which is to be mailed to the producer of these vaccines is also attached to this policy. Catholics may never choose a vaccine derived from aborted fetal cells if there is an alternative available.

### **Chicken Pox**

If the student has not had the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine but has had the varicella (chickenpox) disease, then a statement signed by a licensed medical physician, a physician assistant, or an advanced practice registered nurse, parent, or guardian must be submitted verifying the name of the student and the year in which he or she had the disease. A model form for this statement is attached to this policy.