

New Jersey Catholic Conference

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POLICY ON RELIGIOUS EXEMPTIONS FOR IMMUNIZATIONS

The Catholic Bishops of New Jersey strongly encourage all parents to vaccinate their children for the health and safety of not only those children, but also all members of the school community with whom they may come in contact. The National Catholic Bioethics Center, interpreting the statements of the Pontifical Academy for Life, has encouraged Catholic parents to vaccinate their children against rubella and other serious diseases, despite the unfortunate origin of the cell lines used in the manufacture of these vaccines. Still, some parents raise objections about the safety of the vaccines for their children. In those cases, parents normally use the principle of conscience as the guide to make moral decisions for their children.

The summary provided by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services regarding Regulation 4 (Religious Exemptions) is as follows:

1. A parent/guardian may request a religious exemption to the New Jersey mandatory immunization regulations by submitting a written statement to the school or child care center which explains how the administration of immunizing agents conflicts with the pupil's exercise of religious tenets and practices.
2. Requests for religious exemptions which are not based on religious beliefs and practices should be denied. The New Jersey legislation and regulations have never recognized nor permitted philosophical or moral objections as reasons for securing a religious exemption. Except for medical and religious exemptions, all children are expected to comply with the school immunization regulations.
3. A religion-affiliated school or child care center now has the authority to accept or deny a religious exemption request without oversight by secular health authorities.

Therefore, the request of a parent/guardian for a religious exemption from immunization will be honored, as long as the language mentions the specific religious belief (normally the conscience of the parent) in the letter. Please note that non-immunized children may be excluded from school, for their own protection, if there is an epidemic situation. This exclusion will be based on the judgment of the local school administration.

Approved December 6, 2007 by the New Jersey Board of Bishops.

*Representing the Archdiocese of Newark, Diocese of Camden, Diocese of Metuchen,
Diocese of Paterson, Diocese of Trenton, Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic and
Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese*