

## **Immunization**

The Catholic Church does not prohibit the use of any vaccine, and generally encourages the use of safe and effective vaccines as a way of safeguarding personal and public health and out of concern for the common good. The Diocese of Birmingham understands though that there are children who may be medically ineligible to receive certain vaccines, and there may be moral objections to vaccines derived from cell lines of aborted children (*i.e.*, vaccines which contain these cell lines). We seek to balance, as best as possible, these doctrinal, moral, and medical concerns so that we can provide healthy environments for all students, faculty and staff in our parish and diocesan Catholic schools and early learning programs.

*Code of Alabama, 1975, §16-30-4* outlines that boards of education and the governing authority of each private school shall require each pupil who is otherwise entitled to admittance to kindergarten or first grade, whichever is applicable, or any other entrance into an Alabama public or private school, to present a certification of immunization or testing for the prevention of those communicable diseases designated by the State Health Officer, except as indicated by a licensed medical professional or by obtaining religious exemption based on objection in writing to specific tenets or practices of his or her faith.

In addition, the Alabama Department of Human Resources has required each child two months of age or older attending any childcare center/home to present a Certificate of Immunization for the prevention of diseases administered according to the most recent version of the Recommended Immunization Schedules for Persons Aged 0 Through 18 Years, as published by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

As such, any child enrolling in or re-entering a school serving prekindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades or an early learning program serving infant through K4 in the Diocese of Birmingham must provide an appropriate Certificate of Immunization on a form approved by the Alabama Department of Public Health. *A student without an appropriate Certificate of Immunization may not be enrolled in the school or early learning program, unless a medical or religious exemption have been obtained in accordance with requirements set by the Diocese of Birmingham.*

If a medical or religious exemption has been granted to a child in a Diocese of Birmingham school or early learning program, the exemption lasts throughout the child's educational tenure in our schools. Upon leaving a Diocese of Birmingham school or early learning program due to graduation, transfer, relocation, or withdrawal, the exemption letter or certificate is returned to the parent with a copy retained in school or early learning center records. The school or early learning program may also provide a copy of the letter or certificate to the transferring school or early learning program if it is within the Diocese of Birmingham.

## **Medical Exemption**

For children enrolling in a Diocese of Birmingham school or early learning program with medical contraindication to any of the required vaccinations for school admittance, a Certificate of Medical Exemption, obtained from a licensed medical professional or the County Health Department must be provided. In addition, the Diocese of Birmingham will accept a letter provided by a physician who is licensed to practice medicine, surgery, or osteopathy that indicated an accepted medical

contraindication to vaccination or an allergy to any of the ingredients used to formulate the vaccine, as consistent with the labeling of the vaccine as regulated by the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Any vaccination(s) required for school or program admittance not medically contraindicated must be obtained.

In the event of an outbreak of a communicable disease within a school, those students exempted from vaccination should be protected from exposure. This may include the exclusion of infected students from the school or early learning program as well as allowing unvaccinated children to avoid the school or early learning program for the duration of the contagious illness. Schools may provide accommodations for at-home learning during this time period, at the discretion of the school's principal.

Procedure for Medical Exemption at a Diocese of Birmingham school or early learning program:

1. The parent or guardian submits a Certificate of Medical Exemption or letter of medical contraindication from the licensed physician who treats the child to the school or early learning program. The Certificate of Medical Exemption or the letter of medical contraindication must outline the medical reason(s) for exemption and the specific vaccination(s) that cannot be administered.
2. The parent writes a letter of request to the Superintendent of Schools and provides the letter to the principal or early learning director.
3. The principal or early learning director submits the parent's letter of request and the Certificate of Medical Exemption or letter of contraindication to the Superintendent of Schools, providing the mailing address, phone number, and email address for the family.
4. The Superintendent of Schools responds to the family's request in writing and provides copies of the response to the school or early learning program's pastor and principal/director.
5. The child cannot enroll in the school or early learning program until an affirmative response from the Superintendent is granted.
6. Families should submit their request for medical exemption at least 60 days prior to the desired enrollment date at the school or early learning program.

### **Religious Exemption**

Students in schools or early learning programs in the Diocese of Birmingham may receive a religious exemption from vaccination under certain circumstances. Religious exemptions will be granted through diocesan procedure and are limited to those objections that are in adherence with the tenets of the Catholic faith as identified and accepted by the Bishop of Birmingham in Alabama. Specifically, exemptions may be granted to students whose parents demonstrate a sincere, conscientious objection to vaccines derived from descendent cell lines of aborted fetuses. Certificates of Religious Exemption issued by State or County Health Departments are not accepted.

This limited religious exemption only covers those vaccinations derived from descendent cell lines of aborted fetuses. All other vaccinations required for school or early learning program admittance

must be obtained. A Certificate of Immunization showing the vaccinations received must be on file with the school or early learning program to be admitted.

In the event of an outbreak of a communicable disease within a school, those students exempted from vaccination should be protected from exposure. This may include the exclusion of infected students from the school or early program as well as allowing unvaccinated children to avoid the school or early learning program for the duration of the contagious illness. Schools may provide accommodations for at-home learning during this time period, at the discretion of the school's principal.

Procedure for Religious Exemption at a Diocese of Birmingham school or early learning program:

1. If the parent or guardian submits a Certificate of Religious Exemption or indicates a desire to refrain from vaccination for religious reasons, the principal provides the policy for Religious Exemption and request procedure to the family.
2. The parent writes a letter of request outlining the reasons for religious objection to vaccination to the Superintendent of Schools and provides the letter to the principal or early learning director.
3. The principal or early learning director submits the parent's letter of request to the Superintendent of Schools, ensuring that the family's mailing address, email address, and phone number are provided to the Superintendent.
4. The Superintendent of Schools responds to the family's request in writing and provides copies of the response to the school or early learning program's pastor, the principal/director, and the Bishop of the Diocese of Birmingham.
5. The child cannot enroll in the school or early learning program until an affirmative response from the Bishop/Bishop's delegate is granted and the Certificate of Immunization showing receipt of vaccines not included in the exemption is on file.
6. Families should submit their request for religious exemption at least 60 days prior to the desired enrollment date at the school or early learning program.

Approved by Bishop Steven Raica August 20, 2024