

Philosophical Exemption From School Immunization Requirements

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Issue

Has Connecticut ever had a philosophical exemption from school immunization requirements? Has the state's religious exemption from these requirements ever been amended to prohibit it from being used as a philosophical exemption? This report updates OLR Report [2020-R-0066](#).

Non-Medical Exemption from School Immunizations

Connecticut has never had a philosophical exemption from school immunization requirements but implemented both a medical and religious exemption in 1959 (PA 59-588). Under the act, a child could be exempted from school immunization requirements if a parent or guardian presented a statement that such immunization was contrary to the child's religious beliefs. The 1959 act applied to the polio vaccine; later acts added to the required immunizations. An earlier law allowed school boards to require vaccinations and provided for medical, but not religious, exemptions.

In 2015, the legislature amended the law to also exempt children who present a statement that the immunization would be contrary to the parents' or guardians' religious beliefs. It also required that the statement be officially acknowledged by a notary public, Connecticut-licensed attorney, judge, family support magistrate, court clerk or deputy clerk, town clerk, justice of the peace, or school nurse ([PA 15-174](#) & [PA 15-242](#) codified at [CGS § 10-204a](#)).

However, legislation enacted in 2021 eliminates the religious exemption and grandfathers in students enrolled in grades kindergarten or higher who submitted a religious exemption prior to

April 28, 2021. (It continues to do so if they transfer to another public or private primary or secondary school in the state.)

Under the act, children with prior religious exemptions who are enrolled in pre-kindergarten or other preschool programs generally must comply with immunization requirements by September 1, 2022, or within 14 days after transferring to a different public or private program, whichever is later. But these children may extend the timeframe if they present a written declaration from the child's physician, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse that an alternative immunization schedule is recommended ([PA 21-6](#), effective April 28, 2021).

For more information on the state's school immunization requirements, see OLR Report [2021-R-0134](#). For information on other states' religious exemption laws, see OLR Report [2019-R-0235](#).

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