

# VACCINATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES OF PITTSBURGH'S THREE JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

## POLICY STATEMENT

Jewish tradition demands that we take all available steps to protect our life and health and that of our children in accordance with the advice of competent medical authority. Current immunization guidelines are developed by a standing committee of the Centers for Disease Control, in collaboration with the American Academies of Pediatrics and Family Practice. They represent the combined expertise of our nation's leading epidemiologists, infectious disease specialists, and primary care physicians, and are designed to maximize immunity to vaccine-preventable disease at the earliest possible age, with the least burden on families and the maximum amount of safety.

Given the strength of this recommendation it should be incumbent upon every Jewish individual to follow these recommendations unless the individual's physician specifically advises them not to because of a direct risk to their own health (as in the case of a transplant recipient who cannot receive live vaccine, or a patient with an egg allergy who cannot receive influenza vaccine). The obligation is much stronger due to the fact that the act of immunization protects not only the individual but the community as a whole.

Jewish schools should play a pro-active role in ensuring near-universal vaccination in our community. Studies have shown that the existence of state and local regulations requiring immunization as a pre-requisite for entry into school correlate with higher rates of immunization in those locations. By setting and enforcing a policy requiring proof of immunization prior to entering school, the Jewish schools in our community not only send a message as to the importance of this goal, but take an active step toward achieving the goal, thereby fulfilling the mitzvah to preserve health.

## PROCEDURES

- 1. Immunization Requirement.** All students will be required to provide proof of current, age-appropriate immunizations according to current Pennsylvania immunization requirements prior to the beginning of each school year. Children in infant care and preschool programs will be required to provide proof of adherence to the universally recommended schedule produced by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice of the CDC. NB: In cases where a range of ages is given as the recommended time to administer a vaccine, a child will be considered in compliance if they have received the vaccine by the end of that age range. However, where state requirements exist specifying a specific grade level at which the requirement must be completed, the state requirement takes precedence.
- 2. Request for Medical Exemption Forms.** Any student not meeting these requirements must have *his or her licensed primary healthcare provider or regularly treating pediatric specialist* complete and sign a Physician's Medical Exemption Certificate form (See Attachment 1) explaining the *medical rationale* for not immunizing the child in accordance with the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, and

Centers for Disease Control Guidelines. A copy of the CDC guidelines for medical exemption will be provided to families as a part of their medical paperwork. Parents of the student must file a Parental Application for Medical Exemption (Attachment 2) together with the Physician's Medical Exemption Certificate.

3. **Requests Outside CDC Guidelines.** We recognize that in rare cases a legitimate reason for medical exemption may exist which is not covered explicitly in the CDC guidelines. In these cases, the student's medical provider as described in Paragraph 2 should complete the same form for medical exemption noted in Paragraph 2 identifying the condition requiring the exemption, the specific vaccinations from which the child should be exempted, the duration of the exemption (not to exceed one year; exemptions lasting longer than one school year must be explicitly renewed each year), and documentation from the medical literature as to why the child's condition requires exemption from the specific vaccines in question.
4. **Panel Review.** All requests for medical -exemption will be subject to review by a panel of primary pediatricians selected by the schools as an immunization advisory panel. The panel may take one of three actions: a) find that the request clearly meets CDC standard, or is clearly a legitimate request that was not included in the guidelines, and recommend the grant of the exemption; b) find that the request meets neither the CDC guidelines nor the separate standard outlined in Paragraph 3, and recommend denial of the exemption; c) find that the request is plausibly valid but requires consultation regarding the submitted evidence with a specialist in pediatric infectious disease or other relevant specialty before making a recommendation on the exemption. Requests not containing a rationale for the exemption, or in which the physician clearly states that there is no medical rationale other than family preference, will be automatically denied. Requests not containing complete immunization records will be sent back to the family and not considered until all records are submitted together with the request.
5. **Provisional Admission During Panel Review.** All reviews of the type outlined in Paragraph 4 will be conducted as expediently as possible, up to a maximum of 30 calendar days. If the matter cannot be resolved in that time the panel will notify the family and the school of such well before the initial period has expired. A student seeking a medical exemption will be provisionally admitted to school while the review is pending unless there is current concern for an infection risk (an active outbreak for which that student could be a carrier). Following completion of the review, the student's family will have a grace period of 5 (five) school days to complete any vaccines for which the requested exemption was denied or to submit a written schedule for catch-up vaccination.
6. **Catch-up Schedules.** We recognize that a student who is delayed in receiving immunizations often cannot receive them all at once. Therefore, once a student can provide

proof of having received the first doses in a “catch-up” schedule, along with a dated schedule from the physician indicating when the next doses are due, that student can be allowed to return to school. The state of Pennsylvania now provides a standard form for such schedules which families will be expected to use and follow. The school will exclude the student at a later date if the family does not follow through with completing the catch-up schedule on time and submitting proof thereof to the school. Here as well, a grace period of 5 school days after the earliest possible date the vaccine could be given will be allowed to enable the family to schedule an appointment. If the vaccine is not completed by the end of that grace period the student will be excluded until proof of administration is submitted.

7. **Panel Review of Catch-up Schedules.** If the catch-up schedule from the medical provider is not in accordance with the CDC catch-up guidelines, the school may submit the proposed catch-up schedule from the medical provider to the panel doctors for their recommendations as to whether to approve or deny the proposed catch-up schedule. If the catch-up schedule recommendation by the panel is to deny the proposed catch-up schedule request, the school may deny admission to the child until an approved catch-up schedule is recommended by the child’s medical provider. Alternate catch up schedules will only be considered if a medical rationale is provided.

**8. Grace Period.** Students not meeting the requirements outlined above will be excluded from school until they can comply with the requirements. Public schools in Pennsylvania now allow only a five (5) school-day grace period from the first day of classes before enforcing these requirements and our schools will do the same.

**9. Religious exemptions.** While Pennsylvania law does not mandate that a child be immunized if the parent, guardian or emancipated child objects in writing to the immunization on religious grounds or on the basis of a strong moral or ethical conviction similar to a religious belief, we consider vaccination to be a part of a person’s Jewish obligation to protect one’s own life and health and that of others. Therefore, pursuant to the Judaic principles and tenets adhered to by each Jewish Day School, it is the religious policy of the three Pittsburgh Jewish Day Schools that they will not grant exemptions based upon religious belief or strong moral or ethical convictions.