School Law Nonmedical Exemptions:
What Healthcare Practitioners and Clinic Staff Need to Know
(Updated May, 2014)

In 2013, Oregon passed legislation that changes the process for claiming a nonmedical exemption to school and child care immunization requirements. This law is in effect as of March 1, 2014.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the new law change?
The new law requires parents or guardians who want to claim a nonmedical exemption to receive education about the benefits and risks of vaccination before claiming the exemption.

Parents and guardians have two options to receive this education:

1. Talk to a healthcare practitioner. The practitioner can sign a Vaccine Education Certificate.
   OR
2. View the online vaccine education module. At the end of the module, print a Vaccine Education Certificate.

The parent will turn in the Vaccine Education Certificate and a completed Certificate of Immunization Status to the child’s school or child care. The Certificate of Immunization Status is the official immunization record that the school or child care maintains.

Click here for a graphic of the process that parents will follow to claim a nonmedical exemption.
Or visit: www.healthoregon.org/vaccineexemption

The law also changes the language from “religious exemption” to “nonmedical exemption.” This change allows for a breadth of reasons why a parent or guardian may choose to claim an exemption.

Am I required to provide education to parents or guardians who want to claim a nonmedical exemption?
No. Healthcare practitioners can choose whether to provide education, or to refer parents and guardians to the online module.

Studies show that receiving education from a healthcare provider is the best way for parents to make informed decisions about whether or not to vaccinate. Healthcare providers are a trusted source of information about vaccination, and parents often follow the recommendations of their provider.

We encourage healthcare practitioners to make the decision about whether to provide education or to refer parents and guardians to the online module based on what is most appropriate for their clinic and their patients.
How do I document that I have provided education to a parent or guardian?

Document that you have provided education on the Vaccine Education Certificate. The Vaccine Education Certificate is available at www.healthoregon.org/vaccineexemption. On this certificate, mark the vaccines about which you provided education and add your signature. The parent or guardian will turn this certificate into their child’s school or child care, along with the completed Certificate of Immunization Status.

In addition to signing the Vaccine Education Certificate, do I also need to sign the nonmedical exemption section of the Certificate of Immunization Status form?

No. Healthcare practitioners only sign the Vaccine Education Certificate. The parent or guardian will sign the nonmedical exemption section of the Certificate of Immunization Status. The parent or guardian will submit both completed documents to their child’s school or child care facility.

If I sign the Vaccine Education Certificate, does this imply that I agree with the parent’s decision to claim a nonmedical exemption?

No. Signing the Vaccine Education Certificate simply means that you have provided education about vaccine benefits and risks. It does not imply that you agree with or endorse the decision not to vaccinate.

If I choose to provide education, what information am I required to provide?

Healthcare practitioners are required to provide information that is consistent with the information published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Topics to be covered include disease epidemiology, the benefits and risks of vaccination, and the safety and efficacy of each vaccine for which a parent or guardian wants to claim an exemption. This is consistent with the information provided in the online module. A healthcare practitioner can modify the content to address a parent’s or guardian’s specific concerns.

Are there specific materials I must use when providing education?

No. You may choose which materials (if any) to use, as long as they meet the requirements listed in the previous question.

Useful materials have been developed by CDC, AAP, and other organizations that discuss vaccine-specific information and common concerns. Links to materials are available on Oregon Immunization Program’s website at: http://1.usa.gov/ProvidersVaccineSafety

If I provided education in the past, can I sign the form?

You may sign the Vaccine Education Certificate if you’ve provided education within the past 12 months that meets the requirements.

What about my patients who already have exemptions on file at their schools?

If the religious exemption section of the Certificate of Immunization Status was signed prior to March 1, 2014, no action is needed. If the parent or guardian makes updates to the exemption already on file, he or she will need to complete the online module or receive education from a healthcare practitioner.
If, in the future, new vaccines become required for school or child care attendance, parents choosing to exempt their child will need to submit documentation with their Certificate of Immunization Status showing that they have received education from a healthcare practitioner or through the online module.

**My clinic requires that parents or guardians who don’t vaccinate their children sign a “refusal to vaccinate” form. Can this be submitted to the school instead of the Vaccine Education Certificate?**

No. The Vaccine Education Certificate is a specific document that must be submitted to a child’s school or child care with the Certificate of Immunization Status when a parent or guardian chooses to claim an exemption after they received the required education from a healthcare practitioner.

The refusal to vaccinate form is an optional form some providers use to document when parents or guardians refuse some or all vaccines. This form is kept in the patient’s medical record.

**Can RNs or MAs provide education?**

Education must be provided by an MD, DO, ND, NP, or PA.

RNs working under the direction of one of the first four above listed healthcare practitioners can also provide vaccine education.

**Can I bill insurance for providing education when no immunizations are given?**

Yes. You may bill using CPT codes 99401-99404 when preventive education is provided with no other services. However, this does not mean that insurance plans will reimburse for these codes. We encourage you to contact the insurance plans you contract with to find out whether they will reimburse for these codes.

DMAP fee-for-service does reimburse for these codes.

The 99401-99404 codes are for physician and mid-level provider use only. If RNs at your clinic provide this education and sign the Vaccine Education Certificate, the 99211 (Level 1 Outpatient Evaluation and Management Code) code can be used. This code doesn’t require the presence of a physician, but the patient must be established to the practice and the physician must have a plan created that the patient will be receiving counseling from the RN.

**Are materials available to use when providing education to parents and guardians?**

Yes. Materials are available on Oregon Immunization Program’s website at: http://1.usa.gov/ProvidersVaccineSafety

**Where is the online vaccine education module located?**

The online module is available at: www.healthoregon.org/vaccineexemption

**Should I encourage all my patients to view the online module?**

The module is designed specifically for parents or guardians who are thinking about claiming a nonmedical exemption for their child. It may not be appropriate for all families. We encourage clinic staff to view the online module to determine whether it is appropriate for all patients, and to use the other vaccine education materials available on Oregon Immunization Program’s website.
Will the online module be available in languages other than English?
Alternate formats will be available upon request. To request materials in an alternate format, contact Oregon Immunization Program at (971) 673-0300.

Why is this law important?
Oregon has one of the highest exemption rates in the country. In the last decade, the annual rate of nonmedical exemptions for Oregon kindergartners has risen steadily from 2.4 percent in 2001-02 (first graders included) to 7 percent in 2013-14. Some counties in Oregon have kindergarten exemption rates as high as 15 percent, and some schools have exemption rates as high as 70 percent. This leaves communities vulnerable to diseases such as measles and pertussis.

Other questions?
Please contact the Oregon Immunization Program at (971) 673-0300, or visit our website at: http://bit.ly/vaccine_and_imms