

Date: May 19, 2020
To: Iowa Immunization Stakeholders
From: Immunization Program
RE: Immunization Requirement

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) Immunization Program has received inquiries regarding the validity of medical and religious immunization exemptions for the 2020-21 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, questions pertaining to Iowa Code section 139A.8(4)(b) and Iowa Immunization Administrative Code 7.3(3) which state “Medical and religious exemptions under this rule do not apply in times of emergency or epidemic as determined by the state board of health and declared by the director of public health.”

It is the Department’s position this code section is applicable only if the emergency or epidemic results from an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease and that Iowa Immunization Administrative Code 7.3(3) would therefore not apply to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence school districts should continue, even during the COVID-19 outbreak, to recognize medical and religious exemptions if a student satisfies the requirements for the exemption.

In addition, the Iowa Immunization Program has been in consultation with health care providers, other states, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and currently does not plan to delay or suspend immunization requirements for the 2020-21 school year. In order to attend school or licensed child care for the 2020-21 school year, the child needs a valid Iowa Department of Public Health-Certificate of Immunization, Provisional Certificate of Immunization, or Certificate of Immunization Exemption. Most children will qualify for provisional enrollment by having received at least one dose of each of the required vaccines. A provisional certificate is valid for 60 days and allows time for the child to receive additional vaccine doses. As restrictions continue to be lifted in Iowa, many health care providers are expanding services for well-child visits.

The Iowa Immunization Program continues to work with partners locally and nationally to monitor the ever changing situation surrounding COVID-19. Questions regarding immunization requirements may be directed to Shelly Jensen at Shelly.Jensen@idph.iowa.gov or 800-831-6293 ext. 2.