

## Strong Public Policy Reduces Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

**Position:** The West Virginia Immunization Network (WIN) strongly opposes philosophical exemptions for immunizations. Philosophical exemptions may result in a significant number of children going without needed immunizations to prevent diseases that can and do cause permanent injury and death.

*Adopted Dec. 10, 2010*

### **What are Exemptions?**

Medical exemptions are determined by a physician. These may occur when a child is allergic to some vaccine components or has an immune deficiency, such as occurs when being treated for cancer.

Religious exemptions are allowed when immunizations contradict the parent's sincere religious beliefs.

Philosophical exemptions refer to other beliefs held by the parents who do not believe that their child should be immunized.

### **Why WIN does not support philosophical exemptions**

Immunizations have been one of the greatest achievements in medicine and public health, saving untold suffering and death, as well as financial resources.

Vaccine-preventable diseases can, and do, return when immunization levels decline. States that easily permit exemptions or offer philosophical exemptions have more children with exemptions and more outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. (*March 16, 2005; Congressional Testimony, Daniel Salmons, Ph.D, MPH*)

Exempt children pose a risk to other children who are too young to be vaccinated or have medical reasons contraindicating vaccination, such as children with cancer.

Given that nearly all of West Virginia is considered a healthcare provider shortage area, with a relative lack of pediatricians in most areas of the state, enacting new laws to allow for philosophical exemptions can create a climate in which parents claim exemptions as a matter of convenience, due to the vastness of the State's health care shortage areas and despite the best efforts of health care providers and public health officials to educate parents and raise awareness about the need for appropriate immunizations for children.

*(Continued)*

## Maintaining adequate vaccination rates is important to reducing health care costs in West Virginia

- In the US, vaccination programs have eliminated or significantly reduced many vaccine-preventable diseases. However, these diseases still exist and can once again become common—and deadly—if vaccination coverage does not continue at high levels. (*CDC; National Immunization Program*)
- The total estimated cost to the public health infrastructure of containing a single case of measles is \$142,452. (*Pediatrics, 2005*)
- Immunizations are one of the most cost-effective preventive measures available. For every \$1 spent on MMR vaccine, more than \$21 is saved in direct and medical care costs. For every \$1 spent on DTaP vaccine, \$24 is saved.

### Where are we?

- The nation has experienced a 341% increase in rate of pertussis (whooping cough) since 2002 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Immunization Program)
- All states have compulsory immunization laws. **West Virginia currently has one of the most effective public health laws on compulsory immunizations in the U.S. - - current WV Code §16-3-4 does not allow for philosophical exemptions.**
- Research has shown that in states where philosophical exemptions are allowed, the rates of vaccine-preventable diseases have increased. **Allowing philosophical exemptions in WV will likely result in increased rates of vaccine-preventable diseases and will subsequently increase costs for already challenged local public health and education infrastructures as well as increase costs to parents.**
- As of May 2004, all 50 states allow vaccination exemptions for medical reasons; 48 states allow exemptions for religious reasons; and **only 20 states allow exemptions for philosophical reasons.**
- **Non-medical exemptions have resulted in increases in vaccine-preventable diseases in California (*Pediatrics, 2010*), Minnesota (*MMWR, 2009*), Michigan (*Am J Epidemiol, 2008*), Indiana (*N Engl J Med, 2006*), Colorado (*Pediatrics, 2004*), and Utah (*JAMA, 1999*).**

**WIN supports West Virginia's current strong public policy regarding exemptions, which is supported on the national level by several organizations, including:**

- American Medical Association
- American Academy of Pediatrics

**Endorsed By:**     **The West Virginia Immunization Network (WIN)**  
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