

The logo for the Arizona Department of Health Services is a blue rounded rectangle. Inside, the text "Arizona Department of Health Services" is written in white, stacked in three lines. To the right of the text is a stylized sunburst icon in a golden-brown color.

Arizona  
Department of  
Health Services

# Action Plan to Address Increasing Vaccine Exemptions

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*Arizona Immunization Program Office  
Arizona Department of Health Services*

*2/10/2015*

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## Background

Personal belief exemptions (PBEs) are on the rise in Arizona – these [rates](#) were more than twice as high in the 2013-2014 school year (3.9%) as they were in 2003 (1.6%). In response to the concern over rising exemption rates, the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) commissioned the University of Arizona to conduct a study examining potential reasons for the increase.

The study results, released in January 2013, included surveys, town hall meetings, interviews, and focus groups with school officials, parents, and physicians. Detailed results of the study are available at <http://azdhs.gov/phs/immunization/statistics-reports.htm>. In summary, the study found that schools with mostly white students, those with fewer students using free and reduced lunch, charter schools, and schools in the northern part of the state were more likely to have higher personal belief exemptions. Exempting parents expressed concerns about vaccines including fear of autism and other side effects, dislike of too many vaccines, perceived potential vaccine contaminants, perceived lack of vaccine effectiveness, and lack of trust of manufacturers, pharmaceutical companies, government, and physicians. Physicians expressed that personal conversations with parents were their most effective tool in educating parents about vaccines. Review of schools with reported high exemption rates found that in some schools, record keeping challenges led to higher exemption rates reported than what actually existed.

The University of Arizona derived a series of recommendations to address the increase in personal belief exemptions based on the study findings. These recommendations included outreach, education, and a change in practices across settings including schools and healthcare provider offices. The recommendations served as the framework from which ADHS developed its action plan for addressing the rise in personal belief exemptions.

## Planning

Following release of the study results and recommendations, a stakeholder workgroup was convened including partners from local health departments, The Arizona Partnership for Immunization (TAPI), the Arizona Child Care Association, First Things First, Child Care Resource and Referral of Arizona. In addition, multiple internal meetings were convened between key partners including the Arizona Immunization Program Office, the Bureau of Childcare Licensing, and the Bureau of Women and Children's Health. Through these initial planning meetings, key strategies for addressing the rise in exemptions were identified based on the University of Arizona's recommendations.

Once initial plans and strategies were identified, a wider group of stakeholders were asked to provide input and approval of plans. This included the Arizona Local Health Officers Association (ALHOA), and the Arizona County Immunization Coordinators.

## Action Plan

A variety of strategies were identified to address the rise in personal belief exemptions. Implementation of some of these strategies occurred in tandem with extended strategic planning efforts in order to take immediate action where possible. Following is a summary of planned and recently completed actions to address the rise in personal belief exemptions:

### Childcare Centers

Action Item & Description	Completion Target
<b>Revise religious beliefs exemption form (<a href="#">English</a> &amp; <a href="#">Spanish</a>)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include language identifying symptoms associated with each vaccine-preventable disease (VPD)</li> <li>- Require parents to initial each VPD listed acknowledging that they have received information</li> </ul>	
<b>Revise medical exemption forms (<a href="#">English</a> &amp; <a href="#">Spanish</a>)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include links to statutes and rules governing exemptions.</li> <li>- Provide clear language regarding the need for a physician or nurse-practitioner's statement and signature.</li> </ul>	
<b>Distribute <a href="#">immunization education flyers</a> in the Summer 2013 Empower Pack mailing</b>	
<b>Revise childcare forms to simplify the process of managing immunizations data:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Immunization data reports</a></li> <li>- Requirements/referral form (<a href="#">English</a> &amp; <a href="#">Spanish</a>)</li> <li>- <a href="#">Exemptions forms</a></li> </ul>	
<b>Develop a <a href="#">toolkit</a> to help childcare providers comply with immunization reporting requirements</b>	
<b>Produce a <a href="#">reference and resource document</a> to provide guidance to schools and childcare about immunizations requirements</b>	
<b>Produce a fillable Immunization Data Report Form for childcare providers</b>	
<b>Conduct a web-based training for childcare providers on immunization requirements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jointly delivered by immunization and Office of Childcare Licensing staff</li> <li>- Recorded and posted on website</li> </ul>	
<b>Provide immunization requirement training to childcare providers at the Office of Childcare Licensing's biannual childcare provider meeting</b>	

## Schools

Action Item	Completion Target
<b>Revise personal beliefs exemption form (<a href="#">English</a> &amp; <a href="#">Spanish</a>)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include language identifying symptoms associated with each VPD           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Require parents to initial each VPD listed acknowledging that they have received information</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>Revise medical exemption forms (<a href="#">English</a> &amp; <a href="#">Spanish</a>)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include links to statutes and rules governing exemptions.</li> <li>- Provide clear language regarding the need for a physician or nurse-practitioner's statement and signature.</li> </ul>	
<b>Provide copies and education to school nurses about updated exemption forms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dissemination at school nurse conferences throughout the summer, 2013</li> <li>- Mass email messages were sent to schools statewide to provide links to the new exemption forms and guidance regarding their use.</li> </ul>	
<b>Improve engagement of local health department staff in monitoring vaccine coverage levels in schools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School and childcare site visits added into counties' contract activities</li> <li>- Counties notified of school-specific immunization coverage levels in their jurisdiction to target site visits</li> </ul>	
<b>Produce a <a href="#">reference and resource document</a> to provide guidance to schools and childcare about immunizations requirements</b>	
<b>Develop an educational packet for school administrators to deliver in high exemption schools</b>	

## Provider Offices

Action Item	Completion Target
<b>Provide Learn at Lunch trainings to healthcare providers statewide</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Twelve 8-hour sessions provided to over 700 individuals by TAPI and ADHS in the following areas:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Utilizing educational materials to improve immunization</li> <li>▪ Communicating with vaccine hesitant parents</li> <li>▪ The use of the new exemption forms</li> <li>▪ Other immunization topics not related to exemptions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <b>Ongoing</b>
<b>Equip AIPO staff with <a href="#">resources</a> for providers to facilitate vaccine conversations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shared network folder established to house materials</li> <li>- AIPO Assessment staff carry copies of materials on site visits</li> <li>- All AIPO staff informed of available resources</li> </ul>	
<b>Provide access to <a href="#">patient education resources</a> for talking to parents about vaccines on the ADHS website</b>	

## Parents

Action Item	Completion Target
<b>Provide targeted lectures to areas with high exemptions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- AIPO medical director has provided talks to Northern Mohave County community March and October 22, 2013.</li> </ul>	 <b>Ongoing</b>
<b>Conduct a Facebook campaign: Why I Immunize</b>	 <b>Ongoing</b>
<b>Provide <a href="#">electronic reports</a> of school and childcare-specific vaccine coverage and exemption data</b>	
<b>Develop a concise FAQ webpage for vaccine hesitant parents, including links to educational resources</b>	

## Evaluation

In order to assess the impact of these activities, exemption rates in childcare facilities and schools will be tracked:

Measure	Baseline (2012-2013)	2013-2014	Data Source
Childcare Exemption Rates	3.8%	4.1%	Immunization Data Reports
Kindergarten Exemption Rates	3.9%	4.7%	Immunization Data Reports
Percent of childcare facilities with exemption rates >5%	29%	28.4%	Immunization Data Reports
Percent of Kindergartens with exemption rates >5%	35%	33.9%	Immunization Data Reports