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Gallatin City-County Health Department

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Matt Kelley, MPH
Health Officer
Gallatin City-County Health Department
215 W Mendenhall
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Parent /Guardian,

You have reported to your child's school a medical or religious exemption for immunizations. Please read the following information regarding immunizations, exemptions, and the risks of attending school without being fully immunized. If you still decide to pursue an exemption, please sign on the line below acknowledging you have read this information and return it to your school.

School immunization requirements are in place to protect your child and all children at our schools from diseases that cause serious illness. While medical exemptions are sometimes appropriate and necessary, unwarranted use of exemptions increases the risk of disease transmission and illness for all students, particularly those who have underlying medical conditions that affect their immune systems. If a disease outbreak occurs at our school, under-immunized children are at greater risk to become ill themselves and to accelerate the outbreak by passing the illness on to other students and our community.

If such an outbreak occurs, you should be aware that children who are not up to date on immunizations will be excluded from school by the Gallatin City-County Health Department for an extended period of time, perhaps as long as several weeks depending on the severity and the scope of the outbreak. An outbreak of pertussis (whooping cough) at Bozeman High School caused the Health Department to exclude nearly 50 under-immunized students for an extended period of time. Montana has the highest rate of pertussis in the nation and the Health Department is monitoring this and other diseases. While the decision to exclude students is difficult, the Health Department will take action to contain disease outbreaks to protect students, staff and the community.

The State of Montana allows two types of exemptions from immunization requirements: religious and medical. (State rules also allow schools to grant "conditional attendance" for children who are "catching up" on vaccinations. Conditional attendance agreements are designed for students seeking to catch up on all immunizations and should not be regarded as exemptions.)

If you choose to use a medical exemption, you should know that such exemptions are subject to review by the State Medical Officer to determine validity. The State Medical Officer may have the exemption reviewed by a panel of physician experts. The expert panel then advises the State Medical Officer whether the exemption is consistent with standard medical practice. If evidence is lacking for the exemption, the child may be excluded from school until one of three conditions is met, including: (1) all required vaccines are administered, (2) a plan is created and agreed to

by Gallatin City-County Health Department to administer the missing vaccines using the minimum intervals set by Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), or (3) adequate medical evidence is provided justifying the exemption.

The intent of these rules and procedures is to protect our children and our community from diseases which can be prevented. If a vaccine-preventable disease is identified in the school your child attends, the following procedure will be followed:

1. A health care provider, school district nurse, or a medical laboratory will notify the Gallatin City-County Health Department (GCCHD), which manages response to communicable disease cases and outbreaks.
2. GCCHD investigates the matter to determine those individuals who are deemed close contacts and notifies them of their risk, as well as treatment options.
3. Those deemed close contacts may be asked to take measures to reduce transmission of the disease. Those deemed close contacts may also be asked to complete recommended treatment or have proof of a negative lab test before being allowed to return to school. Students without school mandated immunizations or close contacts who refuse to take measures to contain spread of disease may be excluded from school by the County Health Officer for an indefinite period of time.
4. Those students who have a conditional attendance form for immunizations may also be excluded from school if the GCCHD determines it necessary. Students who have a conditional attendance plan must adhere to their plan or risk being excluded from school until their immunizations are up to date or another plan is completed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this statement. We appreciate your effort in keeping Gallatin County Schools a healthy environment for our students, staff and families.

Best regards,

Matt Kelley, MPH
Gallatin County Health Officer
Gallatin City County Health Department

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read all of the information above and understand that my child's exemption from immunization means that he/she may be at greater risk to contract and spread communicable diseases. I also understand that my child may be excluded from school for an extended period of time if the Gallatin City-County Health Department determined that he/she is at risk during a disease outbreak.

Child's Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date