Non-Medical Exemption Policies in Child Care Centers: An Analysis of Colorado Practice Compared to National and Global Contexts

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Background
- Immunization policies at child care centers help ensure children, including those who can’t be vaccinated, are protected against vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Some child care centers in Colorado have implemented policies that remove non-medical exemptions (NMEs) to vaccination to enhance the level of protection.
- Child care administrators often seek guidance for improving their immunization policies, but few Colorado-specific resources currently exist.

Methods
Immunization policies from a random sample of 50% of child care centers that reported immunization data to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in 2018-2019 were collected and analyzed to determine policy completeness and if the policy permitted NMEs (personal or religious) to vaccination. Policies were collected from each facilities’ website.

Policy Classification
For a child care center’s immunization policy to be considered “complete” for the purposes of this analysis, it must clearly include all five of the following components:
1. Which immunizations are required
2. When immunizations are required
3. How to submit immunization records to the facility
4. Consequences if not in compliance
5. Whether exemptions to immunizations are available

Results
- Of the 741 facilities included in this analysis, 40.62% did not have an immunization policy available online.
- Of the 440 facilities with a policy available online, 67.27% were incomplete (missing at least one component).
- Only 19 (4.32%) policies in the sample clearly do not allow for NMEs; 41.59% of policies are unclear on whether NMEs are allowed; 54.09% clearly accept NMEs.
- The most frequently missed policy component was a reference to required immunizations (only included in 48.64% of policies).
- The majority of policies (65.68%) include a reference to Colorado state immunization law.

Policy "Completeness" Breakdown (n = 440)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Classification</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No policy found</td>
<td>301 (41%)</td>
<td>19,619 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete (policy missing at least one component)</td>
<td>296 (40%)</td>
<td>20,179 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete (policy includes all five components)</td>
<td>144 (19%)</td>
<td>7,800 (16%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions & Recommendations
- The vast majority of Colorado child care centers lack immunization policies that are clear and complete.
- Although the majority of policies reference exemptions, many (42%) are unclear on whether NMEs are allowed.
- Findings from this work can support child care centers in improving their immunization policy’s clarity.
- Future work should expand on this framework to examine whether clear immunization policies correlate with increased immunization rates.

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