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HHS Protects Parents’ Rights in Children’s Health Decisions

WASHINGTON — DECEMBER 3, 2025 — The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) today announced strong actions to protect the rights of parents within the practice of pediatric medicine. HHS opened an investigation into a complaint that a Midwestern school illegally vaccinated a child with a federally provided vaccine without the parents’ consent by ignoring a religious exemption submitted under a state law. HHS also issued a [Dear Colleague letter](#) [\[PDF, 265 KB\]](#) reminding health care providers about federal law requiring them to provide parents access to their children’s health information. In addition, the Department directed the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to add a grant requirement stating that all funding recipients must comply with all applicable federal and state parental-consent laws for any services or care provided to minors at HRSA-supported health centers as a condition of receiving Health Center Program funds.

“Today, we are putting pediatric medical professionals on notice: you cannot sideline parents,” said **Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.** “When providers ignore parental consent, violate exemptions to vaccine mandates, or keep parents in the dark about their children’s care, we will act decisively. We will use every tool at our disposal to protect families and restore accountability.”

The investigation by HHS’ Office for Civil Rights (OCR) into the reported violation of the exemption from vaccination will examine whether the school failed to comply with the Vaccines for Children Program (VFC) requirement that conditions federal provision of vaccines for immunization on compliance with state religious and other exemptions from compulsory vaccination. OCR will also examine how the state agency and school district process religious exemption requests to ensure compliance with state law when implementing the VFC program. Program providers receive vaccines purchased for the VFC by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“The Vaccines for Children Program should never circumvent parents’ rights,” said **Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary and CDC Acting Director Jim O’Neill**. “Secretary Kennedy’s decision to probe potential abuse of the VFC is a necessary step in restoring public trust in immunization policy.”

OCR’s letter to health care providers spells out parents’ right to access their children’s protected health information under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy Rule. Under the Privacy Rule, a parent is the personal representative of his or her minor child where the parent has the legal authority to make health care decisions for the child. The letter reinforces that parents who are their children’s personal representatives can exercise their children’s rights with respect to protected health information, including the right of access. OCR is also initiating compliance reviews of a number of large health care providers to ensure that parents receive timely access to their children’s health information.

As part of these actions to protect parents’ rights, HRSA is directly addressing the parental consent obligations that apply to HRSA-supported services for minors. Before a minor receives medical, dental, behavioral health, or other services at a HRSA-supported health center, the center must obtain consent from a parent or legal guardian in accordance with applicable state or federal law. This requirement applies to all forms of care, including treatment, preventive services, counseling, and services involving sensitive topics such as sexual identity or reproductive health. Existing state, federal, and local laws on parental consent and notification already apply, and HRSA is now clearly detailing these expectations as a condition of receiving Health Center Program funding. HRSA will also send a notice to grant recipients outlining this obligation.

If you believe that you or another person’s health information privacy or civil rights have been violated, you can [file a complaint](#) with OCR.

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