

Right or Wrong? Child vaccinations

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I recently delivered my first child, and I'm perplexed about vaccinations. Some people would consider me a bad mother for immunizing my child, while others would say I'm a bad mom for not immunizing my child. Help me weigh my options.

To vaccinate or not to vaccinate, that is the question. If only Hamlet had provided us an answer. Vaccination has developed into one of the most contentious arguments in modern parenting.

Exemptions

The choice is there for you to make. In the United States, all 50 states allow exemptions to immunizations based on medical reasons. In two states, Mississippi and West Virginia, medical reasons are the only exemptions. Thirty-one states allow exemptions based on medical or religious reasons. Seventeen states, including Texas, allow exemptions based on medical, religious or philosophical grounds.

In Texas, the applicable statutes are found in the Texas Education Code, Section 38.001; the Texas Health and Safety Code, Section 161.004; the Texas Human Resources Code, Section 42.043; and the Texas Administrative Code, Rule §97.62. In each of these documents, a child may be exempted from the immunization clause applicable "for reasons of conscience, including a religious belief."

Texas law

Texas does not define or keep a list of religious beliefs that justify the

exemption. All a parent has to do is sign an affidavit swearing religious belief is the reason for claiming the exemption.

Ethically, you must decide if religious belief is the real reason you want to avoid immunization for your children. Very few religious faiths have an actual doctrine opposing vaccination, the most notable exception being The Christian Church, Scientist. Thus, religious objection primarily is delegated to you as an individual to swear you believe immunizations violate your belief in the complete power of faith to heal or the objection that foreign material entering your child's body violates God's command to keep the body holy.

Philosophical objections

Most people today do not honestly disagree with immunizations on religious grounds. Their concern is more philosophical, debating the effectiveness of the vaccines or the possibility of the vaccine causing a greater harm than the effect of the disease. In particular, the argument of whether or not immunizations cause autism has generated much fear and concern that give people pause when making this decision.

Once again, in Texas, that philosophical burden of conscience qualifies for the exemption, so a specifically religious claim is not necessary. This relieves some of the ethical burden of having to swear to something you do not necessarily believe in order to achieve the result you think is correct.

Seek counsel

The arguments are plentiful on both sides of the issue. The best advice is to seek counsel from a doctor you trust, research the issues yourself and pray for God's direction. Know for certain that whatever your decision, you will please some and anger others. Coming to an educated, prayerful decision you are comfortable with is your only option.

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If you have a comment about this column or wish to ask a question for a future column, contact Bill Tillman, consulting ethicist for "Right or Wrong?" at btillman150@gmail.com.