



DIOCESE OF FRESNO
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Dear Catholic School Families,

Over the past two months, the Bishop's Office and Office of Catholic Education have received numerous emails, phone calls, petitions, and letters regarding the COVID-19 vaccine mandate for students. Most communications have been reflections of the love, care, and concern you have for your children. Thank you for your respectful approach and prayers as we continue to review this issue. The intent of this letter is to lend clarity and transparency on the Diocese of Fresno's perspective on the COVID-19 vaccine for students.

As a diocese, our policies on COVID-19 remain governed by three basic principles:

- Adherence to Catholic moral teaching
- Protecting the health of our students; faculty and staff; and
- Respect for the law

California state law currently requires that students in public, private, and charter schools be vaccinated for measles, mumps, polio, and seven other diseases in order to be enrolled in school. For those ten required vaccinations, only medical exemptions are allowed. There are no religious or personal belief exemptions for these ten required vaccines.

The list of required vaccinations can be expanded by the Governor and State health authorities, but if the list is expanded without legislative approval, the law requires that any mandate include a medical exemption and a personal belief exemption. (HSC section 120338) After Governor Newsom's announcement on October 1, this is our current reality. At this point, we have no information indicating how the state legislature will proceed. Please note the following:

- If the legislature decides to allow for a personal belief exemption, the Diocese of Fresno will accept any parent request for exemption as valid.
- If the legislature decides not to allow for a personal belief exemption, the Diocese of Fresno, by law, will not be allowed to accept a parent request for exemption.

In addition, many parents who have reached out have shared their understanding that the Bishop and/or superintendent has the authority to choose whether to implement the vaccine mandate. This is simply not true. As previously stated, the Diocese of Fresno will uphold the law and will not deviate from public health mandates. Both the law and public health mandates apply to all schools: public, private, religious, and charter. Those school and system leaders who state otherwise are misinformed and misleading.

The question of COVID mandates divides our parent communities as it divides our societies. We hope that this transparency by the diocese balances the need to protect the health of our students, teachers, and staff with the rights of parents to decide issues vital to their children.

May God continue to grant us His Grace as we continue on our journey.

In Christ,

Most Reverend Joseph V. Brennan, D.D.
Bishop, Diocese of Fresno