

Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty. Inc.

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Dear Des Moines Register Editors:

Thank you for your [January 8th editorial](#) encouraging an information requirement for parents seeking a religious exemption from immunizations of their school children.

In 1991 there were 1,117 Iowa K-12 children with religious exemptions from immunizations among a total K-12 enrollment of 512,676. In 2006 there were 2,005 Iowa K-12 children with such exemptions. In 2012 there were 4,958 Iowa K-12 children with religious exemptions from immunizations among a total K-12 enrollment of 510,186. While Iowa's school enrollment has declined since 1990, religious exemptions from immunizations have increased by more than 300% in the same period.

The unimmunized children are often clustered. In Jefferson County, home of the Maharishis, 9.2% of the schoolchildren have religious exemptions from immunizations.

The exemptions have caused many disease outbreaks. The nation's largest measles outbreak since 1992 was started by an unimmunized Christian Science child. The disease spread to 247 persons, nearly all children, and far beyond the child's church.

My husband and I lived in Iowa for 29 years and made many efforts to repeal Iowa's religious exemptions from child health laws. Several organizations and legislators supported our efforts, but never enough to get a bill passed. Iowa remains one of only a handful of states with a religious defense to manslaughter.

Rita Swan, President
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