

St. John's Public Health Statement FAQ's

1. What is the purpose of the Public Health Statement?

The statement is an intentional effort to protect the health and well being of the youngest and most vulnerable among us. It is not an intentional effort to exclude or offend, but rather to do everything in our power to make sure that God's house is a safe and welcoming place for all of God's children.

2. What is the source of the Public Health Statement?

Recent outbreaks of measles around the United States caused concern in the children's ministry. Our nursery/preschool facilities host more than 200 children under the age of 5 on a weekly basis. Most of these children are more vulnerable to vaccine preventable diseases than the general population, either because they are too young to be eligible for any vaccinations at all, or they are too young to have completed their full course of vaccinations. The children's ministry initiated a conversation with Church Council about how best to provide a healthy and safe environment for our children. The Church Council adopted the Public Health Statement through the same process that the Children and Youth Protection Policies (Safe Sanctuary Policies) were adopted in 2003.

3. What is being done to ensure that the facilities are clean and sanitary?

The Trustees have reviewed our communicable disease concerns with the contracting company responsible for managing our chemicals and cleaning process to ensure that we are using chemicals that are safe for children to be exposed to, but are also capable of sanitizing surfaces with which children come in contact with. Nursery and Preschool staff and volunteers also disinfect classrooms after each use.

4. How are vaccine preventable diseases spread from person to person?

Some diseases, such as measles, are airborne and can exist in the air for up to two hours. If a person who is ill coughs or sneezes, measles can be transmitted to another person for up to two hours. Other diseases are passed through personal contact and others can live on surfaces. It is for these reasons that we are asking that those who have not been vaccinated to avoid the first floor of the children's building.

5. If a child can contract an illness from any public environment, then what is the point of creating a safe space within the church?

We recognize that vaccine preventable diseases can be picked up in any public environment and that a child's presence in areas of the church outside of the nursery/preschool area may expose him/her to illness. However, the first floor of the children's building (nursery and preschool area) is where our youngest children spend the greatest amount of time and where the likelihood of exposure is the greatest. While it is impossible to prevent the spread of illness in all situations, it is our desire to be sure that we do everything in our power to prevent an illness from being contracted while a child is at church.

6. Why is the first floor of the children's facility (nursery/preschool area) the only place that the Public Health Statement applies to?

This is the area that our most vulnerable children spend the greatest amount of time in. We do not wish to exclude those who choose not to vaccinate from St. John's and/or the opportunity to participate in services of worship. We respect the decision not to vaccinate, but wish to protect those who have chosen otherwise, or are not yet old enough for their families to have made a choice. St. John's received designation as a "Church for all of God's Children" in 2004. That is a designation that we strive to live up to in all ministry areas on a daily basis.

7. Will I be required to show proof of vaccinations in order for myself or my child(ren) to enter the first floor of the children's facilities (nursery/preschool areas) or participate in programming provided by the children's ministry?

In some cases, yes. Children who are enrolled in our weekday preschool and after school programs are required to provide a current immunization record in order to maintain enrollment in their respective programs. Those children who are not able to provide an immunization record are not allowed to enroll in our weekday ministries. Children who participate in our nursery ministries on Sunday morning will not be required to provide a current immunization record. Parents of nursery children will be notified of our Public Health Statement and asked to refrain from using the nursery. We trust that parents will respect the decision made by the leadership of the church. In most cases, children over the age of 5 will not be required to provide immunization records for children's ministry activities outside of the After School program. However, St. John's reserves the right to require an immunization record for programming if we deem it necessary for the health and safety of our children. Parents will be notified in advance in this instance. Volunteers and staff are asked to abide by the policies asked of our children.

8. What happens if a guest is not aware of our Public Health Statement and comes to the nursery with children whose families have chosen not to vaccinate?

All guests are welcome at St. John's. Guests will be made aware of the Public Health Statement and their children will be cared for by nursery staff outside of the first floor nursery/preschool facilities until guests are able to adequately prepare to take their children to worship with them.

9. Don't most schools require immunization records for attendance?

The South Carolina school system requires immunization records, but allows for exemptions. There are two immunization exemptions for public school allowed under South Carolina law. One exemption is for children who are medically exempt due to other health issues that make vaccinations impossible. For example, a cancer patient undergoing chemotherapy may need to postpone vaccinations until after chemotherapy is complete. The other exemption is a religious exemption. Families may choose not to vaccinate their children due to religious beliefs.

10. Will St. John's honor any exemptions?

We will honor medical exemptions and will work with parents on a case by case basis. We will not honor religious exemptions.

11. For more information, please refer to the following websites and publications:

[How Safe Are Vaccines? \(www.healthychildren.org\)](http://www.healthychildren.org)

[Vaccine Studies: Examine the Evidence \(www.healthychildren.org\)](http://www.healthychildren.org)

[Where We Stand: Immunizations \(www.healthychildren.org\)](http://www.healthychildren.org)

[Media Kit: Immunization \(www.aap.org\)](http://www.aap.org)

You might also choose to read:

Eula Biss's, "On Immunity"

and/or

Dr. Paul Offit's, "Deadly Choices."

Both books are available in the church library.

****Please contact info@stjohnsrh.org with questions or concerns. This document may be viewed online at www.stjohnsrh.org under the children's ministry/safe sanctuary tabs.**