Unfounded Vaccine Fears Should Not Be Used as an Excuse for "Religious" Exemptions

By ACSH Staff — January 21, 2003

To the Editor:

As a physician and public health educator, I say it's self-evident that parents' rights to evade vaccinations for their school-age children stop at classmates' respiratory tracts ("Worship Optional")

Parents seeking "religious" exemptions from vaccinations for their kids should be made aware of recent epidemics of whooping cough and other rare communicable diseases. When vaccination rates drop below 80 percent or so, community ("herd") immunity falters and even vaccinated youngsters become vulnerable.

The federal government should require a standard similar to that in New York City: only longstanding and deeply held religious constraints, attested to by clergy and health officials, should preclude vaccination in schoolchildren.

We should not elevate unreasonable fear of vaccines into bogus "religious exemptions."

Dr. Gilbert L. Ross
New York
The writer is the medical director of the American Council on Science and Health.

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