**SB 277 limits immunization exemptions**

Gov. Jerry Brown has signed SB 277 (Ch. 35, 2015) which provides that students in public and private schools will no longer be exempted from immunization requirements based on the personal beliefs of their parents/guardians, beginning in the 2016-17 school year. The legislation was inspired by the outbreak of measles that hit California last year. In his message statement, Gov. Brown acknowledged that the issue has been controversial but “the science is clear that vaccines dramatically protect children against a number of infectious and dangerous diseases. While it’s true that no medical intervention is without risk, the evidence shows that immunization powerfully benefits and protects the community.”

However, it is important to note that personal belief exemptions must still be granted to parents/ guardians who submit a letter or written affidavit by Jan. 1, 2016. Students exempted on this basis must continue to be exempted until the next applicable grade span (i.e., birth-preschool, grades K-6, grades 7-12), at which time immunization will be required. For example, a first grader who has a personal belief exemption on file by Jan. 1, 2016 must be exempted until he or she starts seventh grade. According to Frequently Asked Questions issued by the California Department of Public Health (<http://bit.ly/1MnhpYn>), personal belief exemptions may be transferred across districts and child care facilities within California, but personal belief exemptions from other states or countries may not be accepted.

SB 277 does not affect students who are exempted from one or more immunizations for medical reasons. Medical exemptions should still be granted when a parent/guardian submits a letter from a health provider documenting the need for a medical exemption.