

# Scott Morrison won't reveal religious sect exempted from vaccination

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**Social Services Minister Scott Morrison has refused to reveal which “very small” religious sect has been exempted from vaccination, fearing people will try converting to the faith “just to get another crack” at avoiding immunisation.**

Tony Abbott and Mr Morrison announced yesterday that parents who did not have their children vaccinated would lose access to payments worth thousands of dollars from the Child Care Benefit, the Child Care Rebate and the Family Tax Benefit Part A end-of-year supplement from January 1, 2016.

The exemptions on medical or religious grounds will continue but parents will have to prove they are affiliated with a religious group with a formal objection to vaccination registered by the government.

Mr Morrison, asked today which religions might qualify for the exemption, told the Nine Network: “I am not about to promote it. There is only one, it is a very small religion and I am not about to encourage people to line up with it just to get another crack at an exemption.

“It would have to be formally recognised by the religious body themselves and that religious body itself has to have a formal registered process of objection which has to be accepted by the government.”

A 2013 review of religious justifications for refusing immunisation, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Vaccine*, identified “few canonical bases for declining immunisation” although there were some exceptions.

The Church of Christ, Scientist — founded in Massachusetts in 1879 — which preaches healing disease through focused prayer and “convincing oneself of its unreality”, according to author John Grabenstein, executive director for global health and medical affairs at Merck Vaccines.

In 1901 the church’s founder, Mary Baker Eddy, told a New York newspaper: “At a time of contagious disease, Christian Scientists endeavour to rise in consciousness to the true sense of the omnipotence of Life, Truth, and Love, and this great fact in Christian Science realised will stop a contagion”.

However, Dr Grabenstein wrote, she appeared to relax that position in 1913: “Rather than quarrel over vaccination, I recommend, if the law demand, that an individual submit to this process, that he obey the law, and then appeal to the gospel to save him from bad physical results.”

Some followers of the Dutch reformed congregations, founded in the Netherlands in the 1570s, have rejected immunisation because it makes a person less dependent on God.

The Watch Tower Society, the organising body for Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are known for refusing blood transfusions, also opposed vaccination from the 1920s. However, it adopted a more neutral position in the 1960s.

Scholars of Judaism and Islam have issued religious waivers for vaccinations that include elements of forbidden animals, such as pigs.

There were no significant objections raised in Hindu communities to vaccines that involve trace elements derived from cattle.

Mr Morrison said: “We want to make sure that where kids are coming together in contact and where parents have already made the decision rightly to immunise their children that we are not putting them or the broader community at risk by a very small few which goes against science, against the good health policy and frankly against common sense.”

Mr Morrison said he would “keep a close eye” on the religious exemption and “if that gets abused, we will shut that down too”.

Labor health spokeswoman Catherine King urged parents to “pause and think” before resisting vaccines, noting the recent death of a baby in her regional Victorian electorate from whooping cough.

“You should base what you are doing on the science, not crackpot science on the internet,” Ms King told Perth’s 96FM.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/health/scott-morrison-wont-reveal-religious-sect-exempted-from-vaccination/story-fn59nokw-1227301806139>