

CERTIFICATE OF INCAPACITY/PHYSICIAN'S STATEMENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

A certificate of incapacity has often been confused with the physician's statement required for a school to provide instruction for students with injuries and temporary or chronic illnesses. This short Q & A addresses the use of these two documents.

1. What is a certificate of incapacity?

A certificate of incapacity is a statement (medical note) of a student's illness or incapacity to attend school. If a parent does not send a student to school because of illness, a school may require a parent to provide a statement of the student's illness or incapacity signed by a physician. (I.C. 20-33-2-18.)

2. If a parent provides a certificate of incapacity or statement signed by a doctor, does that mean the absence is excused?

Local school policy determines whether student absences are excused or unexcused. A physician does not determine whether a student's attendance is excused. If a school requires additional medical information, it will need to obtain the consent of the parent to discuss the reason for the student's absence with the physician.

3. What is a physician's statement for students with injuries and temporary or chronic illnesses (physician's statement)?

A physician's statement is required to secure educational services for students with injuries and temporary or chronic illnesses when it is expected that due to the injury or illness the student will be unable to attend school for a minimum of 20 instructional days in a school year, whether these days are consecutive or in the aggregate. Before instruction for a student unable to attend school can begin, the parent must provide the school with the physician's statement. (511 IAC 7-42-12.) The school may need to contact the physician to obtain additional information to enable the school to determine appropriate supports and accommodations during the student's absence from school. If so, parental consent will be required.

4. Does the school need to wait until the student has missed 20 instructional days before providing instructional services?

No. Services should be provided as soon as possible after the school receives the physician's statement indicating the student will be unable to attend for a minimum of 20 instructional days. The intent of this rule is to enable a student with an injury or temporary or chronic illness to keep up with the student's school work.

5. What is the difference between a physician's statement and a certificate of incapacity?

A physician's statement is used to provide the required medical justification to enable schools to make provision for instruction to be provided to students during extended absences. A certificate of incapacity is a note from a physician documenting a student's illness on specific dates so that a school may apply its attendance policy concerning excused or unexcused absences.

6. Can a certificate of incapacity be used in place of a physician's statement?

The title or label on a document is not as important as the content. A physician's statement, regardless of the title on the paper, must include a statement of one of the following:

1. The student has a temporary illness or injury that will require the student's absence from school for a minimum of 20 consecutive instructional days.
2. The student has a chronic illness or other medical condition that will require the student's absence for an aggregate of 20 instructional days over the period of the school year.