

# AN OPEN LETTER TO CONGRESS ON IMMUNIZATION POLICY

June 2, 2008

As advocates for public health, we are writing to express support for immunization and concern about those who decide not to vaccinate their children based on unsubstantiated claims about vaccine risks. No medical intervention is risk-free, but vaccines have an exemplary safety record and significant adverse reactions are very rare. Vaccines are tested in large clinical trials, are thoroughly regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and are subject to comprehensive ongoing surveillance by the FDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the international public health community.

Well-designed scientific studies are the only valid method of demonstrating medical cause and effect. In contravention of this fundamental principle, beliefs not based on science have led increasing numbers of parents to choose not to immunize their children. The implications of this choice are profound. A decision not to vaccinate is not just an individual decision. Because these diseases are spread from person to person, the decision to leave a child unvaccinated not only leaves that child susceptible to vaccine-preventable diseases, but permits the spread of those diseases to the surrounding community, including infants too young to be immunized and those suffering from immunodeficiency conditions. The ongoing measles outbreaks across the nation are a clear, current example. In each instance, the outbreak was started by an unimmunized individual who spread the infection to others, including children whose parents had opted not to have them immunized and infants less than one year of age who were too young to have received measles vaccine.

It is indisputable that immunization has been one of the greatest medical success stories in history. The scourge of smallpox has been eradicated completely, while polio, which once crippled and killed tens of thousands of children annually, now only circulates in a few countries and is targeted for eradication. Bacterial meningitis incidence has dropped dramatically thanks to the introduction of three vaccines that combat various forms of this deadly disease. The list of diseases that have been nearly eliminated by vaccines is long, and millions of lives have been saved as a result. Yet, with the exception of smallpox, any of these diseases can and will return if immunization rates lag.

It is vital to the health of our nation that policy makers stand firm in supporting immunization and rejecting claims that have no foundation in science.

## National Signatories

Academic Pediatric Association	American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Family Physicians	American College of Chest Physicians
American Academy of Neurology	American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery	American College of Osteopathic Surgeons

American College of Physicians	Emory Vaccine Center
American College of Preventive Medicine	Every Child By Two
American College of Radiology	Hepatitis Foundation International
American Gastroenterological Association	Immunization Action Coalition
American Immunization Registry Association	Infectious Diseases Society of America
American Medical Association	March of Dimes
American Nurses Association	Meningitis Angels
American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics	National Association of City and County Health Officials
American Pharmacists Association	National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
American Public Health Association	National Association of School Nurses
American Society for Reproductive Medicine	National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology	National Network of Immunization Nurses and Associates
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research	Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation
Association of Immunization Managers	Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases (PKIDS)
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States	Partnership for Prevention
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials	Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society
Child Neurology Society	The Task Force for Child Survival and Development
Children's Health Fund	Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists	Voices For Vaccines

### **State and Local Signatories**

Arizona Partnership for Immunization	Charles City Regional Health Services (VA)
California Immunization Coalition	Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition
Central Virginia Health Services	

Colorado Influenza and Pneumococcal Alert Coalition	Maryland Partnership for Prevention
Consortium for Healthy and Immunized Communities, Inc. (OH)	Massachusetts Academy of Family Physicians
Danbury Visiting Nurse Association (CT)	Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Garfield County Immunization Coalition (OK)	Massachusetts Immunization Action Partnership
Greater Grand Forks Immunization Coalition (ND)	Mid America Immunization Coalition (MO)
Greater Salt Lake Immunization Coalition	Northeastern Rural Health Clinics (CA)
Health Care Council of Orange County (CA)	Oklahoma County Immunization Coalition
Healthy Community Immunization Coalition (CA)	Oregon Adult Immunization Coalition
Hillsborough County Immunization Task Force (FL)	Oregon Partnership to Immunize Children
Immunization Coalition of Summit County (OH)	Philadelphia Immunization Coalition
Immunization Coalition of Washington, DC	Project Immunize Virginia
Immunization Collaboration of Tarrant County (TX)	Rhode Island Department of Health Childhood Immunization Coalition
Immunization Task Force - Metro Omaha	San Francisco Immunization Coalition
Larimer County Immunization Coalition (CO)	San Juan Unified School District Health Services (CA)
Louisiana Shots for Tots Coalition	Texas Public Health Association
	Tulsa Area Immunization Coalition
	Utah County Immunization Coalition (UT)
	Utah Every Child By Two Immunization Coalition