

# **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 Preventive Medicine	Emory Vaccine Center
American College of Radiology	Every Child By Two
American Gastroenterological Association	Hepatitis Foundation International
American Immunization Registry Association	Immunization Action Coalition
American Medical Association	Infectious Diseases Society of America
American Nurses Association	March of Dimes
American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics	Meningitis Angels
American Pharmacists Association	National Association of City and County Health Officials
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 State and Territorial Health Officials	Partnership for Prevention
Child Neurology Society	Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society
Children's Health Fund	The Task Force for Child Survival and Development
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists	Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
	Voices For Vaccines

### **State and Local Signatories**

Arizona Partnership for Immunization	Consortium for Healthy and Immunized Communities, Inc. (OH)
California Immunization Coalition	Danbury Visiting Nurse Association (CT)
Central Virginia Health Services	Garfield County Immunization Coalition (OK)
Charles City Regional Health Services (VA)	Greater Grand Forks Immunization Coalition (ND)
Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition	
Colorado Influenza and Pneumococcal Alert Coalition	

Greater Salt Lake Immunization  
Coalition

Health Care Council of Orange County  
(CA)

Healthy Community Immunization  
Coalition (CA)

Hillsborough County Immunization  
Task Force (FL)

Immunization Coalition of Summit  
County (OH)

Immunization Coalition of Washington,  
DC

Immunization Task Force - Metro  
Omaha

Larimer County Immunization Coalition  
(CO)

Louisiana Shots for Tots Coalition

Maryland Partnership for Prevention

Massachusetts Academy of Family  
Physicians

Massachusetts Chapter of the American  
Academy of Pediatrics

Massachusetts Immunization Action  
Partnership

Mid America Immunization Coalition  
(MO)

Northeastern Rural Health Clinics (CA)

Oregon Adult Immunization Coalition

Oregon Partnership to Immunize  
Children

Philadelphia Immunization Coalition

San Juan Unified School District Health  
Services (CA)

Texas Public Health Association

Tulsa Area Immunization Coalition

Utah County Immunization Coalition  
(UT)

Utah Every Child By Two Immunization  
Coalition