



# Threats to Vaccine Access: Advocacy Tools and Resources

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Most vaccine policy is determined at the state level, and legislatures across the United States are considering policies and legislation that would limit efforts to achieve optimal levels of protection for children and adults from vaccine-preventable infectious diseases. This is underway while, according to the [Infectious Disease Prevention Network](#), more than 20 states are considered ripe for an urgent or emerging threat to vaccine access.

While IDSA currently focuses on federal legislative and regulatory advocacy, the information provided in this document is intended to support efforts to educate state policymakers about the importance of immunizations and to advocate against proposals that limit vaccine access or weaken state laws that support vaccine uptake (e.g., school requirements). **Your voice is critically needed to help protect access to lifesaving vaccines in communities and among patients.**

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### ADVOCACY TACTICS

Highlighted here are a few ways to educate and advocate with state policymakers.

**FIRST** – Know your state's policies regarding vaccine requirements for schools, health care and other large congregate facilities, and be able to speak to protecting current provisions or recommending where they may need to be changed or expanded.

#### Submit a Letter to the Editor

Responding to an article published in a local paper through a letter to the editor can be a quick and easy way to raise awareness about the importance of vaccines and dispel myths/misinformation. Find the submission guidelines of your local newspaper (typically available on the paper's website), respond quickly to the article and be concise in your response.

For guidance, see [Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor](#) from the Community Toolbox.

#### Submit an Op-Ed to Your Local or State Paper

Op-eds are a powerful way to reach policymakers and build support among the general public. Newspapers or other media

outlets that accept op-eds typically post submission instructions on their websites.

See [How to Write an Op-Ed or Column](#) from the Harvard University Kennedy School and [Writing Effective Op-Eds](#) from Duke University's Communicator Tool Kit.

#### Educate Your State Legislators

Most policymakers hold health care providers in high regard and welcome your knowledge and expertise in infectious diseases. You can engage with your legislators and their staff through email, phone calls and/or virtual or in-person meetings in their district and urge them to take a position supporting access to vaccines. Below are a few resources to help engage with policymakers:

- [Look Up Your Legislators](#) (free [Member Advocacy Program](#) membership required)
  - Work with contacts at your institution to help develop connections if appropriate.
- Know When Your State's Legislature Is in Session: [2025 State Legislature Dates](#)

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### VACCINE ADVOCACY TALKING POINTS

**Note:** If possible, contact your state and local health department immunization program directors to learn about outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease in your district/community/state. While detailed information is confidential, anecdotes highlighting local issues can be very impactful.

#### General vaccine advocacy:

- Vaccines are a science-based, physician-recommended tool for keeping people safe, including infants too young to be vaccinated, the elderly and people with chronic illnesses who are at higher risk from viruses than the general public and who may be less protected from vaccination.
- High vaccination rates in the general population help stop the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases. When vaccination rates drop in a community, the risk of an outbreak is increased significantly.<sup>1</sup>
- A 2019 study found that the most common childhood vaccines prevented more than 24 million illnesses.<sup>2</sup>
- More than 90% of children are vaccinated before they enter kindergarten. However, during the 2023-2024 school year, exemptions from one or more vaccines among kindergartners in the U.S. increased to 3.3% from 3.0% the year before.<sup>3</sup>
- As vaccination rates decline, the number of infections is increasing. For example, CDC reported there were already more reported cases of measles by March 2024 than there were in all of 2023.<sup>4</sup> Pertussis (whooping cough) cases are also increasing, with six times as many cases reported on Dec. 28, 2024, compared to the same time in 2023.<sup>5</sup>
  - Clusters of unvaccinated children and adults increase the risk of an outbreak in a given community.<sup>3</sup>
- Vaccines are backed by decades of scientific data demonstrating their overwhelming safety and efficacy and are some of the most rigorously tested and monitored public health interventions.<sup>6</sup>

- Vaccine-preventable diseases can be extremely serious. For example, measles can cause serious complications, including pneumonia and encephalitis, especially in young children, and in 2024, 40% of measles cases in the U.S. required hospitalization.<sup>4</sup>
- Access to vaccines is also crucial for adults. Every year, more than 50,000 adults die needlessly and thousands of adults suffer serious health problems from vaccine-preventable diseases including influenza, RSV, pneumococcal disease and shingles.<sup>7</sup>
- Some vaccines prevent cancer, notably the HPV vaccine, which prevents cervical cancer, and the hepatitis B vaccine, which prevents liver cancer.<sup>8</sup> Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in the United States.
- Controlling outbreaks of major vaccine-related diseases is costly to local and state health departments and hospital systems and often requires budget expenditures that are unpredictable.

#### Proposals regarding exemptions to childhood vaccine requirements:

IDSA believes that the only exemption for vaccination should be medical contraindication.

- Individuals who seek a belief-based exemption to vaccine requirements should be required to make a request in person, define their reasons for requesting the exemption, and acknowledge in writing that they have been educated about current, scientifically valid vaccine safety information and the consequences of not being immunized, including personal health risks, exclusion from school and causing injury to vulnerable individuals in the community.
- When parents choose not to vaccinate their children, they are not only putting their own children at risk, but also other children who are too young, immunocompromised or otherwise medically not able to receive the vaccine – including family members who are elderly, who have chronic medical conditions or who are immunocompromised.

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- These individuals depend on herd, or community, immunity, which is only effective when high immunization rates are maintained.<sup>1</sup> In several recent outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, some of the sick children were too young to have gotten the vaccine or be fully vaccinated.

### Informed consent proposals:

- There is no federal requirement for informed consent relating to immunization. Vaccinating a child according to the physician-recommended [vaccine schedule](#) is the accepted standard of care.
- Legislation aimed at requiring physicians to review every potential adverse event with patients is aimed at encouraging doubt in parents by describing outcomes that are exceedingly rare, and which often cannot be definitively linked to the vaccine itself.<sup>6</sup>

- Systems for reporting adverse events and unanticipated side effects have successfully detected rare but important side effects not seen in primary trials of vaccines.

### Health care personnel exemption proposals:

- Public health and health care workers are the first line of response to outbreaks and health emergencies.
  - These workers are at a significantly higher risk of being exposed to vaccine-preventable diseases and closely interact with sick patients who may be at greater risk for infection.
  - Forcing a health care facility to hire individuals who do not meet the facility's vaccination requirements unnecessarily endangers vulnerable patients.

Please [contact Sara Hoopchuk](#), IDSA public policy manager, for talking points on any specific proposals not covered above.

## Top Tips for Building a Relationship With State/Local Policymakers

- 1. Go into a meeting with knowledge about the legislator, the district and its demographics.**
- 2. Provide information about who you are and why you care about this issue. Make sure the legislator/staff know how to contact you in the future.**
- 3. Come prepared.** Bring clinic brochures or other relevant information, such as local data about the burden and risk of vaccine-preventable disease.
- 4. Know the opposition's positions and be ready to respectfully respond to them.**
- 5. Always come with a request, or "ask," related to current policy discussions or legislation and an invitation to an event or to visit your clinic.**
- 6. Make your case, briefly and persuasively.** Be specific about what you want the legislator to do and when.
- 7. Tell a personal story and incorporate local issues and data whenever possible to help make the point.**
- 8. Be polite but feel empowered.** As a constituent, legislators work for you and the other individuals they represent, and you have a right to talk to them and their staff about issues that concern you and impact their constituents.
- 9. Be patient and willing to follow legislation throughout the entire process,** which could take an entire legislative session and often multiple sessions.
- 10. Establish a time when you will expect to receive an answer or follow-up.**
- 11. Find ways to stay connected.** Ask to be on the legislator's health advisory committee, receive a regular newsletter and attend local events.
- 12. Follow up promptly with a thank you email and any promised information for the legislators and/or staff with whom you met.**

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## Connect With State and Local Coalitions

Effective advocacy often requires working in coalition with others who share your commitment. To amplify your voice, consider joining a state organization or coalition. Below are a few organizations with state chapters to consider joining, depending on your area of interest.

Organization	What They Do
State & Regional Infectious Diseases Societies: <a href="#">IDSA Affiliates</a>	In states with state infectious diseases societies, they may be engaged in advocacy. IDSA maintains a directory of state societies that are affiliates.
<a href="#">Infectious Disease Prevention Network</a>	Dedicated to building enduring advocacy capabilities to support the diverse pro-vaccine community.
<a href="#">National Network of Immunization Coalitions</a>	A project of <a href="#">Immunize.org</a> that provides webinars, a listserv and a newsletter. Includes a listing of state and local immunization organizations with whom you may be able to connect.

### IDSA Policy Positions

For more information, see the following policy statements approved by the IDSA Board of Directors.

#### [State Immunization Mandates](#)

##### Key Points:

- Vaccines provide enormous value in protecting individuals and populations from serious and life-threatening infections.
- Exemptions should be limited, and states should encourage vaccination by removing financial barriers to access.

#### [Mandatory Immunization of Health Care Personnel](#)

(Joint statement by IDSA, Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America and Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society)

##### Key Points:

- Mandatory immunization programs are the most effective way to increase health care personnel vaccination rates.
- When voluntary programs fail to achieve immunization of at least 90% of personnel, institutions should require documentation of immunity or receipt of ACIP-recommended vaccinations as a condition of employment, unpaid service or receipt of professional privileges.



### How IDSA Can Help

Join the IDSA/HIV Medicine Association [Member Advocacy Program](#) to learn about effective advocacy strategies and coordinate with other members.

Information about immunization policy can be found [here](#). Please contact Sara Hoopchuk, IDSA public policy manager, with any questions at [shoopchuk@idsociety.org](mailto:shoopchuk@idsociety.org).

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Vaccinate Your Family, Vaccines Protect Communities. Accessed February 5, 2025 from <https://vaccinateyourfamily.org/why-vaccinate/vaccine-benefits/community-immunity/>.
- <sup>2</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), AAP News. Accessed January 15, 2025 from <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/20731>.
- <sup>3</sup> KFF, Childhood Vaccination Rates Continue to Decline. Accessed February 4, 2025 from <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/childhood-vaccination-rates-continue-to-decline-as-trump-heads-for-a-second-term/>.
- <sup>4</sup> CNN, Tracking measles cases in the United States. Accessed February 4, 2025 from <https://www.cnn.com/health/measles-cases-us-dg/index.html>.
- <sup>5</sup> AAP, Whooping Cough (Pertussis). Accessed February 5, 2025 from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Whooping-Cough.aspx>.
- <sup>6</sup> AAP, Vaccine Safety: Examine the Evidence. Accessed February 5, 2025 from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/vaccine-studies-examine-the-evidence.aspx>.
- <sup>7</sup> Adult Vaccine Access Coalition. Accessed January 15, 2025 from <https://adultvaccinesnow.org/>.
- <sup>8</sup> American Cancer Society, Cancer Vaccines and Their Side Effects. Accessed February 6, 2025 from <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy/cancer-vaccines.html>.