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 Academy of Chest Physicians
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
American College of Physicians
American College of Preventive Medicine
American College of Radiology
American Gastroenterological Association
American Immunization Registry Association
American Medical Association
American Nurses Association
American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics
American Pharmacists Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
Association of Immunization Managers
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Child Neurology Society
Children’s Health Fund
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

Emory Vaccine Center
Every Child By Two
Hepatitis Foundation International
Immunization Action Coalition
Infectious Diseases Society of America
March of Dimes
Meningitis Angels
National Association of City and County Health Officials
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
National Network of Immunization Nurses and Associates
Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation
Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases (PKIDS)
Partnership for Prevention
Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society
The Task Force for Child Survival and Development
Vaccine Education Center at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
Voices For Vaccines

State and Local Signatories

Arizona Partnership for Immunization
California Immunization Coalition
Central Virginia Health Services

Charles City Regional Health Services (VA)
Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition
Colorado Influenza and Pneumococcal Alert Coalition
Consortium for Healthy and Immunized Communities, Inc. (OH)
Danbury Visiting Nurse Association (CT)
Garfield County Immunization Coalition (OK)
Greater Grand Forks Immunization Coalition (ND)
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 Collaboration of Tarrant County (TX)
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)
Oklahoma County Immunization Coalition
Oregon Adult Immunization Coalition
Oregon Partnership to Immunize Children
Philadelphia Immunization Coalition
Project Immunize Virginia
Rhode Island Department of Health Childhood Immunization Coalition
San Francisco 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