

# COMMUNITY IMMUNITY TOOLKIT







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## Introduction: Why you make a difference

Community Immunity. These days, mentioning it can cause a fight. Community immunity is often been at the fault line between people who prioritize personal freedoms and those who prioritize the greater good.

So before we get into the nuts and bolts of community immunity. Let's start with a call for compassion and an understanding that community immunity is about far more than "herd immunity." It's about caring for one another. It's about wanting a society that mirrors the best among us. It's about protecting the most vulnerable among us.

With that in mind, this toolkit will explain the science of herd immunity but marry it with a healthy dose of optimism. We'll share our vision of what a healthy, functional, and compassionate society looks like and provide helpful hints to move your community in that direction.

One important thread throughout this toolkit is recognizing that the "greater good" concept is not going to resonate with everyone. In order to achieve community immunity, we need everyone to vaccinate so we'll be providing talking

A student once asked anthropologist Margaret Mead, "what is the earliest sign of civilization?" The student expected her to say a clay pot, a grinding stone, or maybe a weapon.

Margaret Mead thought for a moment, then she said, "A healed femur."

A femur is the longest bone in the body, linking hip to knee. It takes about six weeks of rest for a fractured femur to heal. A healed femur shows that someone cared for the injured person, did their hunting and gathering, stayed with them, and offered physical protection and human companionship until the injury could mend.

Mead explained that where the law of the jungle — the survival of the fittest — rules, no healed femurs are found. The first sign of civilization is compassion, seen in a healed femur."



points throughout to appeal to folks for whom the personal benefit is more compelling than the great good. It's what we think of as pragmatic optimism.

We hope you'll find this toolkit inspiring, easy to understand, and most of all, practical and doable. That Utopian community we talk about? It's not pie in the sky. It's actually very easy to achieve if we all get involved. So we encourage you to do your part and inspire others to do their part to achieve that lovely community that cares for each other.



## History: A short but spectacular history of vaccines

Vaccines are so commonplace today that we sometimes forget the awesomeness that is immunization. Fear not, we are going to give you the lowdown on the history of vaccines.

Most of us think about vaccines as a 20<sup>th</sup> Century science but it's been around for thousands of years. Did you know that variolation was recorded as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> Century in China? The Egyptians were using variolation to protect people by the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and West and North Africa started using variolation in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

### More than 100 years of science

Immunization, as we know it, is more than 100 years old. Louis Pasteur, the grandfather of microbiology, also created the very first lab-produced vaccine - in 1879! It was a vaccine to prevent a disease called chicken cholera.

But it was Edward Jenner who really advanced how we thought about vaccines. Jenner realized that exposure to cowpox (a virus similar smallpox but not serious) could protect someone from getting smallpox. During Jenner's time smallpox killed 10-20% of the population.



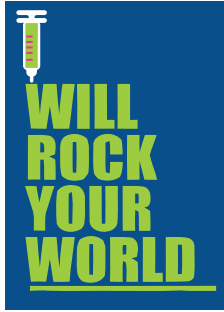
**GROSS**  
*but* **TRUE**

**Variolation** used a small pox scab from an infected person to help protect others from smallpox.

This was the earliest form of immunization.

Thankfully, immunization has evolved. Today's vaccines are much safer and more effective than variolation.





## Successes that rocked our world!

Almost 150 years after Jenner's discovery, vaccines have changed the world as we know it including:

- **Eradicating smallpox from the face of the earth.**  
Smallpox was killing people as early as 1100 BC and remained a frightening and deadly disease for more than 3,000 years. In just the 100 years before it was eradicated, smallpox killed an estimated half a billion people. But vaccines rewrote that history and today smallpox is no longer a threat.
- **Decreasing the number of children who die before their 5th birthday.**  
In 2015 researchers looked at 149 national level health surveys that included 1 million children from 62 countries to see if vaccines reduced childhood death. What they found is one of the strongest cases for vaccines: when the children in a community are fully vaccinated, that community has a 24% decrease in deaths in children under 5 years old.
- **Preventing deadly diseases, EVEN cancer!**  
We often talk about the advances that medicine has made in treating cancer but what about preventing it altogether? Did you know that there are vaccines that do just that? The HPV vaccine targets high-risk Human papillomavirus strains that are responsible for almost all cervical cancers and linked to some throat, anal, and other cancers. Hepatitis B vaccines help prevent infections that can lead to liver cancer.



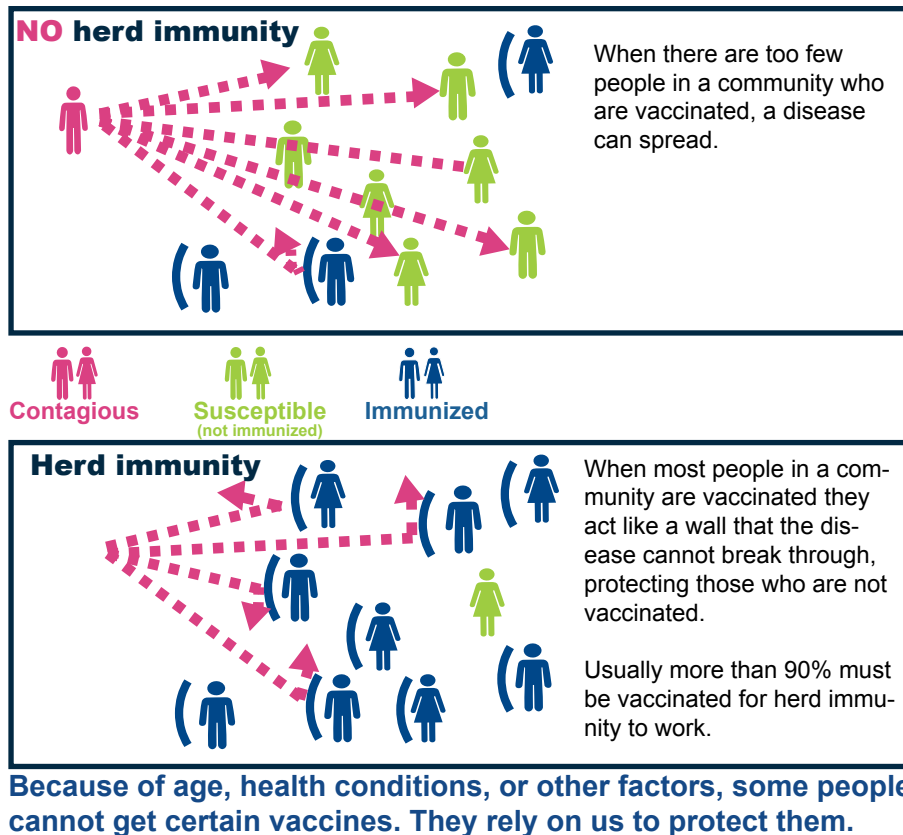
### QUICK TIPS

Some parents are reluctant to give their child a vaccine for a sexually transmitted infection so young. But the vaccine works best when given before someone is sexually active, specifically between 11 - 13 years old.



# Understanding community immunity

So what exactly is community immunity? It's when enough of the community has immunity to a contagious disease so community members who can't be vaccinated are protected from infection. If you reduce the number of people who can get the disease, you limit the opportunity for the disease to spread.



## Did you know...

The two ways to get herd immunity are when most people in a community get sick or get vaccinated. Getting vaccinated is always safer.





For most diseases, the percent of the population that needs to have immunity from a disease in order to protect others is pretty high. For mumps, at least 3 out of 4 of us need to have immunity and for pertussis, it's more like 9 out of 10. Either way, community immunity can only work if most of us are protected.

**So exactly how many of us need to be vaccinated for community immunity?** The short answer is a lot!

Mumps	75-85%
Polio	80-86%
Smallpox	80-85%
Diphtheria	85%
Rubella	83-85%
Pertussis	92-95%
Measles	83-94%

So why bother? Well, even though most of the community needs to have immunity for community immunity to work, it DOES work. It protects those that cannot be immunized...and those are the people for whom a disease could be most serious.



## Why is community immunity all our job?

The short answer is that it's everyone's job because we are decent, good people.

The longer answer is because while vaccines work for most people, there are some in every community that can't get vaccinated. Maybe they are babies – just too young for certain vaccines. Maybe they are immunocompromised – undergoing cancer treatment or have some other medical issues that take vaccination off the table for them. Maybe they are allergic to something in a certain vaccine.

Regardless of the reasons, there are three important truths about people who rely on community immunity:

- The very reasons why they cannot be vaccinated make them most at risk of the disease
- They are just as deserving of being protected as the rest of us
- We should want to protect them for no other reason than we're good people who care about others

For folks who are not buying the greater good reason, community immunity is their job too because we are each better protected when we are all protected. That's because the fewer opportunities for the vaccine to infect others means it has less opportunity to mutate into something dangerous to even vaccinated people.

So while the greater good argument is "I protect you," the fact is that it works in reverse too: "you protect me." While most vaccines are really effective, no vaccine is 100% effective. When a community achieves community immunity, vaccinated individuals are safer too because there will be fewer opportunities for breakthrough cases (cases in fully vaccinated people).



Remember, we have more than 100 years of scientific evidence that proves vaccines are safe and effective. Community immunity is literally one of the easiest “good deed” actions we can do – by protecting ourselves, we protect others...and they protect us. It is no extra work, no extra time, or no extra effort.



### **A mother's story and her son's fight for his life**

In 2011 Laura B.'s 2-year-old son Ben was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL). While Ben has started the MMR vaccine series, he was unable to finish it because of the chemotherapy. Ben was vulnerable and fighting for his life when the unthinkable happened. An unvaccinated child in Ben's hospital unit was diagnosed with measles. Measles is one of the most infectious diseases known to man. It's also serious and potentially deadly for kids like Ben. The medical staff jumped into action giving Ben painful but necessary treatments to try to boost his immune system. Laura was heartbroken:

I looked into Ben's innocent eyes...and could barely speak without crying. How could anyone ask Ben to fight more than leukemia? To ask him to fight a vaccine-preventable disease on top of it? It is unconscionable.

Because of the treatments to try to stave off measles, Ben was left in excruciating pain and unable to walk. He was quarantined for 21 days as Ben's parents and the medical team held their breath hoping against hope Ben didn't contract measles. Ben was lucky and didn't get measles. But for Laura, the entire experience was terrifying. Her message:

Our son has already fought leukemia for three years of his life, a reality that has changed everything. I would never want him to also become a victim of a disease that should not even be in my community. Vaccines are safe and they save lives. By choosing vaccination, you will be protecting your child – and mine.



## Supporting community immunity

Okay, inspired to make a difference? Outstanding! Here's where we give you great tools to help make that happen.

### Where does your community stand?

The first step in boosting community immunity is knowing what the vaccination rates are in your own community. School nurses and administrators are fantastic allies in getting the good word out about protecting your community from preventable disease. Approaching them in a positive, friendly way might be the easiest way to find out your community's immunization rates.

Several states also require schools to publicly disclose vaccination rates, and those rates are often available online and can be found on our resources page ([VoicesForVaccines.org/resources](https://VoicesForVaccines.org/resources)).

Another great tool is CDC's Child Vax View, which can help you find national, regional, state, and selected local area data using interactive maps, trend lines, bar charts, and more. You can find Child Vax View by scanning the QR code at the right.



### Be active in promoting community immunity!

There are generally five great ways to promote community immunity:

- Get the word out
- Get connected
- Find allies
- Reward good behavior
- Engage local media
- Normalize vaccine conversations

Let's quickly look at each of these - they are all easy to do and collectively, very effective.



# Get the word out



So now you know what your local immunization rates are like. Great! Time to let others know, too. It's time to hit the old keyboard and write your local school leaders, PTA president, legislators, pastors, etc. Let them know how well-protect your community is – or how much work your community still needs to do to be better protected.

Couldn't find your immunization rates? Let the people in charge know you want them by making a phone call or writing a letter to your governor, commissioner of health, or anyone else in power who can get that information to the public.



Your local immunization coalition will know where your voice is most needed and will help you get involved. If you have never participated in a legislative, day you're missing out. These coalitions plan all sorts of events where you can talk about your local immunization rates, your desire for a fully protected community, and why it matters. Find your coalition here: <https://www.immunizationcoalitions.org/network-members/?listing>.





Community immunity relies on the community. Seems obvious, right? So reach out to community stakeholders and influencers. Let them know where you see success and where you see the need for more work when it comes to your area vaccination rates. Be sure to talk to:

- The local school board and school leaders
- Chamber of Commerce and other local business associations
- Rotary
- Your local faith leaders
- Local community organizations and nonprofits

Make connections at local events like health fairs, back-to-school events, etc. These are great opportunities to ask the larger community involved in vaccination!



While we'd love to tell you that most people will be swayed by the greater good argument, evidence shows us the "what's in it for me" approach is more compelling. For example, businesses can play a big role in community immunity if they ensure their staff is vaccinated and they are vocal supporters of customer vaccination as well. Schools, too, can celebrate



good immunization rates if they have them. So let's get out there and show them what's in it for them by supporting businesses who choose to vaccinate:

- **Use Yelp!** Have a fully vaccinated business you frequent, give them a 5-star Yelp review, be sure to say that part of the great review is the 100% vaccination status of the business!
- **Ask about vax status:** Ask about vaccination status when booking appointments. If the business isn't fully vaccinated, give your business to one that is – and let them know why they did not earn your business.
- **Allow only vaccinated:** Ensure all in-home service providers are fully vaccinated. Make it clear when making service appointments that only vaccinated individuals are allowed in your home.
- **Say thank you:** Send a card to places that have been publicly helping to create community immunity near you.

## What's in it for me?

When someone isn't inspired by the greater good vision, be sure they understand why community immunity should matter to them personally:

- Vaccinated people are safer when everyone around them is vaccinated
- When a community has herd immunity, it is at less risk of outbreaks that can affect schools and businesses
- Having a large number of unvaccinated in your community can be financially costly
- Having a large number of unvaccinated in your community can be dangerous for other health issues if they overwhelm the local health systems

It's better for us individually if we are all vaccinated!



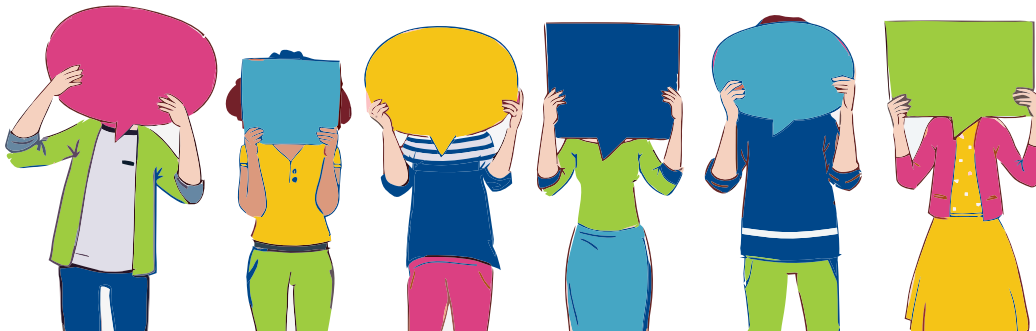
## Engage the local media and other information forums



### Be pro-vax and proud!

Use our Letter to the Editor Toolkit to craft compelling, smart letters. Think beyond the media. Where else do people get community information? School newsletters, healthcare provider emails, and other outlets are great sources of information. Consider drafting pro-vax blurbs for them.

## Normalize vaccine conversations



In the time of COVID, we're learning about the importance of advocating for vaccines at every possible encounter. While those who don't support vaccines are actually a very small percentage of the population, they are vocal. Their out-sized voice has fueled vaccine hesitancy.

It's time for the majority to step up and "right-size" the vaccine conversations in America.

We need to be vocal and clear in our support of science, belief in vac-

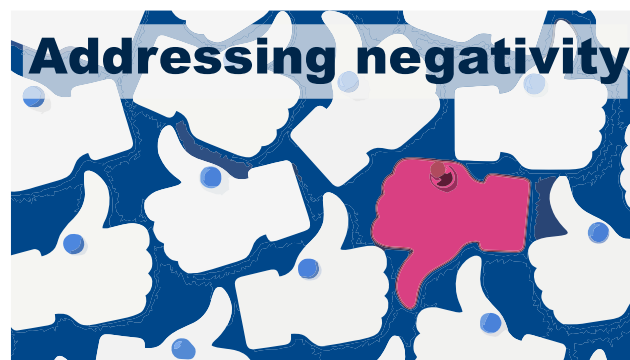




cines, and our expectation that everyone in our space will be vaccinated. Share pro-vaccine information on your social media

### **Learn how to address hesitancy:**

- Model positive vaccine behavior: share your vaccination status, post about your positive flu vax experience, etc.
- Support your friends and family to learn more through fun activities
- Pick a pro-vaccine book for your book club
- Have a vaccine movie night



Most vaccine conversations will go well but every once in a while, a conversation will go sideways. Here are some helpful hints to keep it positive:

- Don't match someone's emotions. Keep it polite. Keep it kind.
- Don't fall back on the "we'll agree to disagree" statement: correct misinformation with understandable facts.
- If a conversation with a stranger gets out of control, end it! Be clear but walk away, "I'm sorry you were given incorrect information but this doesn't feel productive so I'm going to end the conversation." And walk away.
- Don't risk a friendship: If a conversation gets heated with a loved one, end it. "I disagree but our friendship is important to me so let's talk about something else. If you do want to learn the facts about vaccines in the future, I'm here for you."



YOU  
MAKE THE  
DIFFERENCE



[www.VoicesForVaccines.org](http://www.VoicesForVaccines.org)