

# Community Immunity Toolkit

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# WHY YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**TALKING ABOUT** community immunity can feel tricky these days, but at its core, it's about something simple: looking out for one another. It's not just about "herd immunity" as a science-based concept—it's about creating a compassionate community where we all do our part to keep each other safe, especially those who are most vulnerable.



There's a great story from anthropologist Margaret Mead. A student once asked her, "What's the earliest sign of civilization?" The student expected her to mention a tool, a pot, or a wagon. But Mead's answer was different. She thought for a moment, then said, "A healed femur."

The femur is the longest bone in the body, and it takes about six weeks to heal when broken. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, the law of the jungle rules and no mended bones are found. An injured animal left on its own doesn't survive. But a healed human femur means that someone stayed with the injured person, protected them, and helped them recover. It's a sign of compassion and community—the foundation of any civilization.

That's the spirit behind community immunity. In this guide, we'll break down the science of herd immunity in a way that's easy to understand and full of optimism. We'll also share simple, practical ways you can help protect your family and your community.



## WE KNOW ...

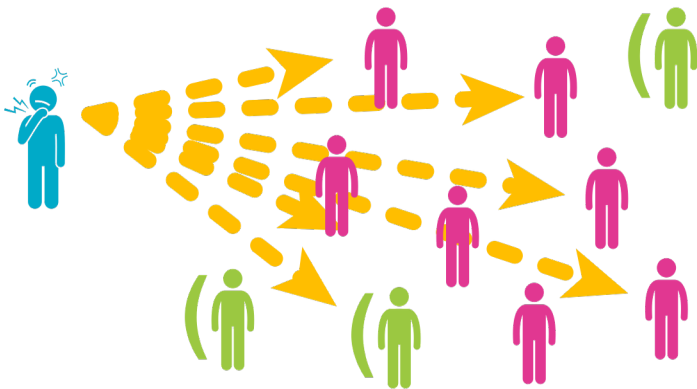
... that not everyone sees the world through the lens of the "greater good," so we'll also share ways to talk about community immunity that might resonate with people who prioritize personal benefits and family protection. At the end of the day, we all want to keep our loved ones safe. We created this toolkit to provide you with simple, effective ways to inspire others to make vaccination choices that protect our community.

# UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY IMMUNITY

## What exactly is community immunity?

Community immunity happens when enough people in a community are protected from a contagious disease through vaccination or previous illness (getting vaccinated is always safer) so that the disease can't spread easily. When you reduce the number of people who are susceptible to infection, you limit the ability of the disease to spread. Community immunity protects those who can't be vaccinated, like newborns or people with certain medical conditions.

### NO HERD IMMUNITY



When there are too few people in a community who are vaccinated, a disease can spread.



Contagious

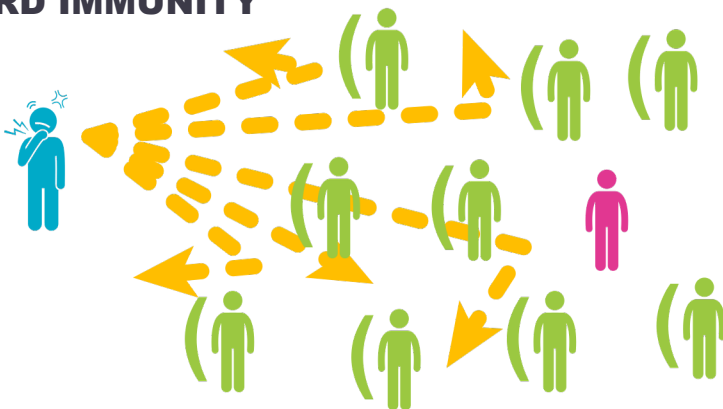


Susceptible  
(not immunized)



Immunized

### HERD IMMUNITY



When most people in a community are vaccinated, they act like a wall that the disease can not break through, protecting those who are not vaccinated.

Usually more than 90% must be vaccinated for herd immunity to work.

**Because of age, health conditions, or other factors, some people cannot get certain vaccines. They rely on us to protect them.**

# UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY IMMUNITY

Another way to understand this idea:



## NO HERD IMMUNITY

If too few people are immune, a disease can spread quickly.



## HERD IMMUNITY

When enough people are immune, the disease has nowhere to go. The immunized people act like a protective shield for the whole community.

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Most diseases require a high percentage of immune people to achieve herd immunity.

For example:

- **Mumps:** 75–85%
- **Polio:** 80–86%
- **Diphtheria:** 85%
- **Rubella:** 83–85%
- **Pertussis (whooping cough):** 92–95%
- **Measles:** 83–94%



## EVEN THOUGH ...

**... it takes a high percentage of immune people to make community immunity work, it does work. It protects those who cannot be immunized and are most at risk—and keeps outbreaks from happening in the first place.**

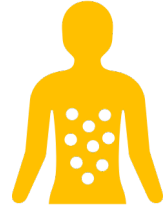
# WHY COMMUNITY IMMUNITY MATTERS TO EVERYONE

Vaccines work for most people, but some individuals can't get vaccinated.



**Babies are too young for certain vaccines.**

**Some people are allergic to an ingredient in a vaccine.**



**Others are immunocompromised; they are being treated for cancer, are transplant patients, or have another medical issue that prevents them from being vaccinated.**

These people rely on the rest of us to help shield them from disease. We have three compelling reasons to help protect the people who cannot be vaccinated:

- The people who can't be vaccinated are often the ones who would get the sickest if they caught the disease.
- They deserve to be protected, just like anyone else.
- Keeping our community safe is something we all can do—because we all care about each other.

Even if someone isn't motivated by the idea of the "greater good," there's still a personal reason to support community immunity: the more people who are immune, the less chance there is for the disease to spread or mutate into something even more dangerous to all of us, vaccinated people included.

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In short, "I protect you, and you protect me." Most vaccines are really effective, but no vaccine is 100 percent effective—that's another reason why community immunity matters. Even those of us who are vaccinated benefit when our community achieves herd immunity, because it reduces the risk of breakthrough infections in fully vaccinated people.

More than a century of scientific evidence shows that vaccines are well tested, with a long track record for protecting people from serious illnesses. We all want to keep our children and communities healthy. When we choose to vaccinate, we're not just protecting our own kids—we're helping to keep others safe too, especially those who can't get vaccinated. It's a simple, effective way to care for one another.

# A MOTHER'S STORY: A FIGHT FOR HER SON'S LIFE

In 2011, Laura B.'s two-year-old son, Ben, was battling leukemia. He had started his MMR vaccine series but couldn't finish it due to chemotherapy. His immune system was too weak to fight off infections on its own.

Then, something terrifying happened. An unvaccinated child in Ben's hospital unit was diagnosed with measles.

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases, and for kids like Ben, it can be deadly. To try to protect him, doctors had to give him painful treatments to boost his immune system.

Laura remembers what those treatments were like for her son: *"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."*

Ben was left in severe pain and unable to walk. He **spent 21 days in quarantine** as his parents and doctors waited anxiously, hoping he hadn't been exposed.

Thankfully, Ben didn't contract measles. But for his mother, the fear was overwhelming.

Her message is simple:

**"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

**FEELING INSPIRED TO HELP?** We have some easy-to-use tools you can use to make a difference.



## Learn your community's immunization rates

Knowing your community's vaccination rates is a great first step in boosting community immunity.

- School nurses and administrators can be valuable partners in spreading the word about disease prevention. A friendly conversation with them may be the easiest way to find out local immunization rates.
- In many states, schools are required to share vaccination rates publicly. These numbers are often available online and can be found on our [resources page](#).



## Be a champion for community immunity!

There are so many ways to help build a healthier, safer community! Here are some simple yet powerful ways to make a difference:

- **Spread the word** – Share reliable vaccine information with your community.
- **Get connected** – Join local immunization groups and advocacy efforts.
- **Find allies** – Partner with schools, businesses, and community leaders.
- **Celebrate positive action** – Recognize and support those who promote vaccination.
- **Engage local media** – Use newspapers, newsletters, and social media to share important messages.
- **Make vaccine conversations normal** – Keep the discussion open and supportive.
- **[Get involved with Voices for Vaccines](#)** – A great way to connect with like-minded advocates.

**Let's take a closer look at how easy and impactful each of these actions can be!**

# SUPPORTING COMMUNITY IMMUNITY



## Spread the word

Now that you know your community's immunization rates, why not share that knowledge? Reach out to local school leaders, PTA members, legislators, faith leaders, and others to highlight the importance of vaccination.

- If your community has strong vaccination rates—celebrate and encourage continued protection!
- If there's room for improvement, let local decision-makers know that this is an important issue for you and your neighbors.

If you couldn't find your local immunization data, consider asking your governor, health commissioner, or other officials to make that information available. A simple email or phone call can go a long way!



# SUPPORTING COMMUNITY IMMUNITY



## Get connected

You don't have to do this alone! Your local immunization coalition is a great place to find like-minded individuals and organizations. They can help you get involved in events, advocacy efforts, and even legislative initiatives.

- Have you ever attended a legislative day? It's a fantastic way to learn and make an impact.
- Coalitions plan local events where vaccines are a key topic—these are great opportunities to talk about supporting a fully protected community.

[Find your local immunization coalition](#) and get plugged in!



## Find allies

Community immunity works best when the whole community is involved. Reach out to local influencers and decision-makers who can help spread the word and take action. Consider connecting with:

- School boards and school leaders
- Business groups like the Chamber of Commerce
- Rotary Clubs and civic organizations
- Faith leaders and places of worship
- Local nonprofits and community groups

Look for opportunities to engage at local events like health fairs, back-to-school events, and public forums. These conversations can make a real difference!

# SUPPORTING COMMUNITY IMMUNITY



## Celebrate & support pro-vaccine businesses and schools

While many people care about the greater good, research shows that personal incentives can be even more motivating. Businesses and schools that promote vaccination should be recognized and supported!

Here are some easy ways to encourage vaccine-friendly policies:

- **Leave a great review** – If a business prioritizes vaccination, give them a 5-star online review and mention an excellent vaccination status!
- **Choose vaccinated providers** – When booking services and appointments, ask about vaccination policies. Support businesses that prioritize health and safety, and let unvaccinated businesses know why they did not earn your business.
- **Prioritize a vaccinated home environment** – When scheduling in-home services, kindly ask about vaccination status and choose providers who are fully vaccinated for added peace of mind.
- **Send a thank-you note** – A little appreciation to businesses and organizations that support community immunity goes a long way!



## WHEN PEOPLE SEE

**the benefits of vaccination in their daily lives, they're more likely to support it.**

# SUPPORTING COMMUNITY IMMUNITY



## Explain why community immunity matters for everyone

Not everyone is motivated by the big-picture benefits of vaccination, and that's okay. Here are some talking points you can use to explain why community immunity is important:

- **Better protection for you** – When more people around you are vaccinated, you're less likely to be exposed to illness.
- **Fewer disruptions to daily life** – Strong community immunity reduces the risk of outbreaks that can close schools, impact businesses, and disrupt routines.
- **Lower financial burdens** – Unvaccinated communities may face higher healthcare costs, lost workdays, and other financial setbacks due to preventable illnesses.
- **A stronger healthcare system** – When hospitals aren't overwhelmed with preventable diseases, they can focus on providing care for other critical health needs.

At the end of the day, keeping vaccination rates high helps **everyone**.



## Engage local media & community newsletters

Help amplify positive vaccine messaging by using the media to your advantage!

- Submit a **Letter to the Editor** in your local newspaper. Need help crafting the perfect message? Our **Letter to the Editor Toolkit** can help!
- Think beyond your local paper. Share vaccine-related blurbs in school newsletters, healthcare provider emails, or community bulletins. Consider drafting positive vaccine messages for them to use. [Contact us for ideas.](#)
- Use social media to spread facts, stories, and encouragement.

# SUPPORTING COMMUNITY IMMUNITY



## Normalize vaccine conversations

Vaccine hesitancy is often fueled by misinformation, but friendly, everyday conversations and [positive vaccine information posts on social media](#) can help shift the narrative.

Some ways to keep vaccine discussions positive and engaging:

- **Model a positive viewpoint** – Post about your vaccination status and your own positive vaccination experiences in a friendly, casual way.
- **Help friends and family learn more** – Share accurate resources in a supportive, enjoyable way. We have ideas for activities that can be learning opportunities.
- **Make it fun!** – Choose a vaccine-related book for your book club or host a vaccine movie night.
- **We are always learning** – Learn about [vaccine hesitancy](#) and [how to talk with vaccine hesitant people](#).



## THE MORE WE MAKE

**vaccine discussions a normal part of life, the more we normalize talking about vaccine benefits. And that's how we create a culture where protecting our communities is just what we do.**

# HANDLING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

**WE KNOW** that vaccine conversations can sometimes be tricky.

Here are some tips to keep things respectful and productive:

**Stay calm and kind – Even if the other person is emotional, keep your tone polite and understanding.**

**Correct misinformation with simple, clear facts – Avoid saying “let’s agree to disagree.” Instead, gently share accurate information.**

**Know when to step away – If a discussion isn’t going anywhere, it’s okay to disengage.**

**Prioritize relationships – If a loved one disagrees, keep the relationship your focus. Try saying “I see we don’t agree, but I care about you, so let’s talk about something else. Just know that if you ever want to learn more, I’m happy to chat.”**

## YOUR VOICE MATTERS.

We have resources for [handling vaccine advocacy on social media here](#). Every conversation that spreads awareness and encourages vaccination helps build a healthier community.

# LET'S WORK TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE!

**BY TAKING** even small steps—having a conversation, supporting local businesses, or sharing information—you're making a real impact.

Let's work together to keep our communities safe, healthy, and protected! Community immunity is one of the simplest ways to do good—not just for ourselves, but for those around us. By protecting ourselves, we protect others. And they, in turn, protect us.

It's a small act with a big impact. And it's something we can all be part of.



Want to do more? **Get involved with Voices for Vaccines to connect with others who are making a difference.**





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

