

January 8, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D., Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: HHS leadership and the importance of vaccines to the health of Americans**

Dear Chair Cassidy & Ranking Member Sanders:

On behalf of the 73 undersigned organizations, we would like to underscore the vital role vaccines play in our health and protection from contagious diseases. It is critically important that those entrusted with safeguarding the health of Americans firmly believe in the science behind vaccines and their proven ability to protect public health.

Immunization is recognized as one of the most significant public health milestones of the 20th century, contributing to improved health and increased life expectancy of Americans. Vaccines have made life-threatening diseases such as polio, smallpox, measles, mumps, and rubella rare. They create immunologic memory, enabling the immune system to respond quickly and neutralize pathogens before they cause infection. Global immunization efforts have saved an estimated 154 million lives over the past 50 years—equivalent to 6 lives every minute, every year. Of these, 101 million were the lives of infants.<sup>1</sup>

Immunocompromised individuals are particularly vulnerable to infections like measles, pertussis (whooping cough), COVID-19, RSV, and the flu, often experiencing more severe outcomes compared to the general population.<sup>2</sup> In the U.S., 6.2% of adults under the age of 65 and 2.6% of children have compromised immune systems.<sup>3</sup> This means that 14 million people under 65, including two million children, have immune systems that don't function properly. Unfortunately, people with immunocompromising conditions are often unable to mount adequate protective responses to vaccines directly, so they rely on the immunity of others to shield them from contagious diseases.

Vaccines not only protect those who receive them but also contribute to broader community immunity. Community immunity refers to the threshold when enough individual people in a community are immune to a disease that the disease cannot spread within that community. Community immunity is essential in safeguarding the most vulnerable members of society, like infants, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-04-2024-global-immunization-efforts-have-saved-at-least-154-million-lives-over-the-past-50-years>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7127a3.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/8/19-1493\\_article](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/8/19-1493_article)

Years of assuming diseases like polio, measles, and whooping cough are eradicated have led to complacency and a significant drop in community immunity. Additionally, the rise in false claims surrounding vaccines has led many people to distance themselves from what was once a widely accepted and non-controversial practice. The decline in vaccine rates has resulted in a rise in vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, including measles and pertussis, across all age groups. For example, despite being declared eliminated in the U.S. in 2000, there was an outbreak of measles in 2019 in an orthodox Jewish community in New York. Because vaccination rates of young children had dropped to 79.5%, significantly lower than the 95% estimated to provide community immunity to measles, more than 600 people were infected.<sup>4,5</sup> The outbreak response was resource intensive and the outbreak caused serious illness, particularly among unvaccinated children.<sup>6</sup> Vaccination is key to preventing these serious health threats and protecting vulnerable populations.

No medical treatment is without risk, and vaccines are no exception. However, a robust set of processes and systems are in place to ensure that vaccines used in the U.S. do not pose undue risk to those receiving them. First, all vaccines go through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval process, including reviewing safety data from multiple clinical trials. In addition, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, run by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), provides a robust post-approval mechanism to track side effects that may be linked to vaccines. A 2021 report from the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research (AHQR) found that serious adverse events, such as life-threatening allergic reactions, following vaccination were rare across more than 300 different studies, demonstrating that these systems work.<sup>6</sup>

It is essential that the incoming Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services support and uphold the evidence-based science around the value of vaccines to safeguard our communities, especially those who are immunocompromised and need community immunity to remain healthy. The risks associated with declining vaccination rates are too great and compromise the health and safety of millions of Americans.

We offer our engagement and expertise and urge the committee to ensure that the confirmed secretary will collaborate with our organizations to protect the health and safety of the patients that we represent. Please contact Lynn Albizo ([lalbizo@primaryimmune.org](mailto:lalbizo@primaryimmune.org)) for additional information, or to set up a follow-up conversation.

Respectfully,

Immune Deficiency Foundation  
American Kidney Fund  
The AIDS Institute  
Autoimmune Association

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241503396>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1912514>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK572041/>

Ability Connection Colorado  
AIDS Foundation Chicago  
Alliance for Aging Research  
Alpha-1 Foundation  
ALS Association  
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
American Pharmacists Association  
Andrews County Health Department  
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC)  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
Avery's Hope  
Biomarker Collaborative  
California Chronic Care Coalition  
CancerCare  
Child Neurology Foundation  
Chronic Care Collaborative  
Chronic Care Policy Alliance  
Colorectal Cancer Alliance  
COPD Foundation  
Cure CMD  
CURE GABA-A  
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation  
Dravet Syndrome Foundation  
El Grupo Vida  
Eosinophilic & Rare Disease Cooperative  
Erie Family Health Centers  
Exon 20 Group  
Family Voices NJ  
Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research  
GBS|CIDP Foundation International  
Global Liver Institute  
HealthHIV  
HealthyWomen  
Hemophilia Federation of America  
HIV Medicine Association  
ICAN, International Cancer Advocacy Network  
Immunize Colorado  
Immunocompromised Association  
Infectious Diseases Society of America  
International Pemphigus & Pemphigoid Foundation  
Juju and Friends CLN2 Warrior Foundation  
Latino Commission on AIDS  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
Maine Parent Federation  
MET Crusaders  
Mother and Child Alliance

NASWTX (National Asso. of Social Workers, TX Chapter)  
National Alliance for Caregiving  
National Bleeding Disorders Foundation  
National Caucus and Center on Black Aging  
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)  
National Consumers League  
National Fabry Disease Foundation  
National Kidney Foundation  
National MPS Society, Inc.  
The Parents' Place of MD  
PD-L1 Amplifieds  
PEAK Parent Center  
Platelet Disorder Support Association  
Prevent Blindness  
Pulmonary Hypertension Association  
PWSA | USA - Prader-Willi Syndrome Association  
RetireSafe  
SCID Foundation  
Sepsis Alliance  
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network  
Transplant Recipients and Immunocompromised Patient Advocacy Group  
United MSD Foundation  
Wiskott-Aldrich Foundation