



Doctors for Change 2019 Policy Priorities

Improve Immunization Rates in Texas

ABOUT DOCTORS FOR CHANGE

Doctors for Change is a member-based organization with over 1,500 participating health care providers, students, and medical residents throughout the Houston region. Our members, Board of Directors, and Leadership Team donate countless hours to make our organization run. The Board and Leadership team work closely with committees and our staff members to accomplish all of the work that we do. Doctors for Change works to increase access to care and improve the health of all Houstonians and all Texans through research, education, collaboration, and advocacy.

WHY IMUNIZATIONS

Vaccines save lives. DFC supports immunization as the safest, most effective way to control and eradicate vaccine-preventable diseases in Texas. Thanks to vaccinations, many of the infectious diseases that plagued past generations—like polio, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus, and H. flu meningitis —have been nearly eradicated. But still, every year, people in Texas die or suffer from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Barriers to immunization access (including lack of insurance coverage, inadequate funding for immunization programs, and poor utilization of Texas' immunization registry) increase the risk of outbreaks of life-threatening diseases in our communities and endanger the health of Texans and our state's economic vitality.

In past sessions, the Texas Legislature has taken significant steps to protect Texans from vaccine-preventable diseases by ensuring college students are protected against meningitis, improving immunization uptake among health care and childcare providers, and ensuring funding for safety net programs. We can do more, however!

Now is the time for Texans to recommit to building a community free of vaccine-preventable diseases. The immunization status of individuals can affect the health of the entire community because vaccine-preventable diseases will re-emerge unless there is a protective shield of immunized individuals to prevent outbreaks. Vaccines are the most effective option for preventing and stopping the spread of infectious disease. Unfortunately, we have seen an alarming increase in nonmedical school vaccine exemptions (from ~ 2,000 in 2003-04 to ~ 57,000 in 2017-18). This could put Texas children at risk for a devastating outbreak of a vaccine-preventable illness like measles. The vast majority of Texans — including 86 percent of Republican primary voters — support strong immunization requirements for school children.

And finally, vaccinations are important for adults, too. Approximately 12,000 Texans died of influenza in the 2017-18 season, and about 75 percent of whom were 65 or older. The flu shot



doesn't provide perfect protection, but even among older people who live in long-term care facilities (where flu outbreaks are most common) the vaccine is 80-percent effective in preventing death from a flu complication.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND:

- Protect children in Texas by not making it easier to obtain a nonmedical school vaccine exemption (we do not want it to be more convenient to opt out of a vaccine than obtaining the vaccine, i.e. – we do not want parents to opt out of immunizations out of convenience).
- Provide rates of unvaccinated children in schools and school districts to assist parental choice.
- Increase education and access to cancer preventing vaccines such as HPV vaccine.
- Reverse 2017 legislation that prevents healthcare providers from immunization children in temporary foster care.

Pertinent legislation:

- HB 3551 (Sheffield): Relating to requirements for and the transparency of epidemiological reports and certain immunization exemption information and reports. Filed 3/6.
- SB 329 (Seliger): Relating to requirements for and the transparency of epidemiological reports and certain immunization exemption information and reports. Referred to Health and Human Services 2/7.
- SB 1427 (Zaffirini): Relating to the immunization data included in and excluded from the immunization registry. Filed 3/4.

It is CRITICAL that we oppose legislation that would make it easier for parents to opt out of vaccines. HB 1490 (Krause) is a dangerous bill that would significantly simplify the nonmedical exemption process and stop collection of data regarding the number of children who have nonmedical exemptions. This bill would put children at risk for dangerous outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.