



# GRANDPARENTS *For* VACCINES



A STORYTELLING MOVEMENT TO PROTECT EVERY CHILD'S TOMORROW!

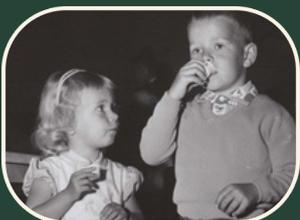
## Happy New Year from Grandparents for Vaccines!

Since our launch last September, we are pleased to announce that Grandparents for Vaccines is now officially chartered in the state of Ohio as a 501(c)(3). Our all-volunteer leadership team now serves as the official GFV Board of Directors: Arthur Lavin, President and Founder; Donna A. Gaffney, VP, Events; Teri Mills, VP, Media; Danielle Dunetz, VP, Social Media; and Kimberly Boller, Treasurer.

In an unprecedentedly difficult year for public health, many individuals and organizations worked to ensure that parents could continue to access reliable information to make informed decisions about their children's health. One of the most visible voices has been epidemiologist Katelyn Jetelina, widely known as Your Local Epidemiologist, who was named to Time Magazine's 2024 100 Most Influential People in Public Health. In her 2025 end-of-year review, "**20 Public Health Wins in 2025,**" **Grandparents for Vaccines made the list!** GFV was recognized among new coalitions for "Standing Up for Science" and praised for "filling gaps, staying rooted in evidence, and helping Americans feel confident and protected."

In December, new state leaders stepped forward, bringing the total to 44 across 22 states. Our goal is representation in all 50 states by the end of the first quarter of 2026. We welcome anyone who can offer a few hours a month. Special thanks to Colorado state leader Diane J. Windsor for keeping our website up to date. Grandparents for Vaccines is all of us, working together for America's grandchildren.

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## Grandparents for Vaccines Opposes Federal Rollback of Childhood Vaccine Recommendations

On January 5, 2026, Grandparents for Vaccines released a [statement](#) criticizing federal health officials for rolling back recommendations for several routine childhood vaccines, warning **the move could put our grandchildren at risk and confuse families seeking medical guidance**. The changes remove long-standing recommendations for vaccines that protect against illnesses, including influenza, hepatitis A and B, RSV, rotavirus, and meningococcal disease.

"For generations, grandparents have seen firsthand what happens when children are not protected," said Teri Mills, MS, RN Emeritus, vice president for media at Grandparents for Vaccines. **"We remember polio wards, measles outbreaks, deaths from the meningococcal sepsis and meningitis. Suffering from diseases that vaccines later helped prevent."**

Grandparents for Vaccines is particularly concerned about the removal of the meningococcal vaccine from the recommended schedule, as this germ once caused horrible suffering from agonizing meningitis and sepsis. "Choosing to drop this protection is tantamount to inviting the threat of this terrible disease into the lives of all our grandchildren," Mills said. "Grandparents for Vaccines also rejected comparisons to European vaccine schedules, including Denmark's, saying differences in population size, classroom density, climate, and disease exposure make such comparisons inappropriate. **The organization emphasized that the vaccines are not banned and that parents can still choose to vaccinate their children.**

"Our message to parents is simple," Mills said. **"The best schedule to follow for protecting our grandchildren is the immunization schedule of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our children should be cared for by pediatricians and doctors who follow this guidance."**

Grandparents for Vaccines says now more than ever, the grandchildren of America rely on being protected by these doctors, whom they trust, not to follow the political winds. The organization emphasized that the vaccines are not banned and that parents can still choose to vaccinate their children.

## Vaccination Rates Are Plummeting. How Is Your Community Doing?

At a time when measles is surging at the highest rates in over a generation – and the US is on the verge of losing the measles elimination status it has held since 2000 – a recent article in *The Washington Post* had a headline concerning every grandparent:

**"U.S. vaccination rates are plunging. Look up where your school stands."**

The article reported that at least 5.2 million kindergarten-age children in the U.S. are living in counties where vaccination rates for recommended immunizations have fallen below the herd immunity threshold (the number doctors say is needed to achieve overall protection for the class), exposing children, their families, and their communities to increasing health risks. Herd immunity protects those children too young to be vaccinated and anyone who is immunocompromised.

### What can YOU do?

- Use the article's search feature to **look up vaccination rates in your community** - and in your grandchildren's communities. Knowledge is power! Here's the link: <https://wapo.st/3YxrDEm>
- **Share what you learn with your family, friends, and neighbors, your local school board, and your elected officials.** (State laws determine vaccines needed for school entrance, and schools must ensure those requirements are met. Measles exposure requires unvaccinated children and adults to quarantine for 21 days, disrupting both learning and earning.)
- **Use what you learn from trusted sources** like GFV when talking with others about the importance of vaccination.



•**Keep sharing with others!** Use the power of your personal stories to show why vaccination matters to you!

Dr. Jeremy Faust, emergency room physician, public health expert, and author of the *Inside Medicine* newsletter, recommends using the following phrase when speaking to those who may be vaccine-hesitant:

**“The politics have changed, but the science has not.”**

Read more in the December 31, 2025, edition of [\*Inside Medicine\*](#).

## Conversation Starters

Many grandparents have told us that one of their greatest challenges is knowing how to talk about vaccines with hesitant parents or with those simply unsure why immunizations still matter for children today. **Younger generations are often unaware of the real-life impact of vaccine-preventable childhood diseases. Your story can help change that.**

To help, each issue of the *GFV Newsletter* will feature one or two brief conversation starters designed to open the door. These prompts are meant to unlock your lived experiences and help you share firsthand stories that bring clarity, credibility, and compassion to these important discussions.

Conversation Starters:

1. *We love you and our grandkids so much. That’s why we’re saying these things.*
2. *We know what these childhood diseases look like and feel like. Here’s what I’ve experienced and seen...*

## Spotlight on Indiana State Leader Deb Robarge



When asked why she got involved in Grandparents for Vaccines (GFV), Deb Robarge of Indiana – better known as “Grandma” to her eight grandchildren – said that, at a time when America’s childhood vaccination rates are falling, “The only way to change people’s hearts and minds is through stories. We, grandparents, have real stories to tell about the importance of vaccines.”

Deb’s stories are borne of painful personal experiences.

The youngest of Deb’s three sons contracted H-flu meningitis at just 7 months old, before a vaccine that prevents the disease was available for babies his age. He thankfully survived, but the illness left him with deafness and significant balance issues. Years later, when meeting other parents of deaf children at her son’s school, Deb discovered that many of his classmates had also become deaf in the same 1985-86 outbreak.

In a separate, equally scary coincidence, Deb’s oldest son contracted meningitis due to the pneumococcal bacteria when he was ten, before today’s vaccine was routinely given as part of the vaccine schedule. A nurse by training, Deb has always been a proponent of vaccines. She served as both a public health nurse and a school nurse and was Director of Nursing for the Indiana School for the Deaf for 20 years, where she organized vaccine clinics for deaf students and faculty. Currently, Deb serves as the Executive Director of the Indiana Association of School Nurses and as a board member of the Immunization Coalition for Indiana.

Deb learned about Grandparents for Vaccines through her nursing colleague and friend, Robin Cogan, New Jersey GFV State Leader. (Robin authors her own blog, [The Relentless School Nurse](#)). The GFV mission of ensuring that America’s grandchildren have the best start in life without the threat of vaccine-preventable diseases strongly matched Deb’s own values and goals, and she knew she wanted to help in their efforts however she could.



## Deb's Story continues

In her role as Indiana GFV State Leader, Deb had the opportunity to put on her grandmother's storytelling hat and speak about her family's experiences and the importance of vaccines in a Zoom call with the Midwest Immunization Consortium. This led to another virtual meeting with the membership of the group Iowa Immunizes. As word spreads, momentum for the Grandparents for Vaccines movement is growing.

### Personal stories have power.

In December, Deb was interviewed by an investigative health reporter for WFYI, a local Indiana NPR/PBS affiliate. In this [interview](#), Deb emphasized the importance of grandparents sharing their first-hand stories of a time before routine vaccinations changed childhood for the better. "If you don't believe your own grandma," Deb wondered, "who are you going to believe?"

## Ways to Help Build GFV!

- \* **Consider sending in your story in writing or via a video** you record with your phone (if the file is too large, we recommend sending it to us using [WeTransfer.com](#), a free website that allows you to email large files). These stories help us increase content on the Grandparents for Vaccines [YouTube channel](#).
- \* **Please follow GFV on all of our social media** (links are at the bottom of the newsletter). GFV would also like to add content from kids, especially teenagers, to our [TikTok page](#).
- \* **Talk to your family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and all who are concerned about plummeting vaccination rates in our country.** Encourage them to join GFV.
- \* **Looking for speakers for an upcoming event? GFV is here to help.** Please let us know, and we will do our best to accommodate your program.
- \* **Consider becoming a state leader (or co-leader)!** As the old English proverb says: Many hands make light work!

## Stories That Inspire

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has shared their powerful, deeply personal experiences. Many of your stories are now featured on the Grandparents for Vaccines YouTube channel. These accounts—told both on video and in writing—bring to life the realities of measles, polio, and other once-devastating diseases, including the severe illnesses and lifelong complications that vaccines now prevent. Your voices remind us all why our stories matter—and why our work continues.

*Once Upon a Time....Our stories began in fear.*

Together, we're writing a new ending—one of trust, science, and love. That's why we remember. That's why we vaccinate.

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