

# Top global public health scientists launch new challenge to anti-vaxxers

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Search engines and social media organizations must do more to prevent the spread of inaccurate information on childhood vaccination, and governments must better support mandatory immunization programs, says an international group of leading public health scientists in a statement published in the *Journal of Health Communication*.

The Salzburg Statement on Vaccination Acceptance lays down several recommendations to combat the global fall in vaccination rates fuelled by a powerful worldwide 'anti-vax' movement. The statement, which pledges to "support the development of new, effective and fact-based communications programs" to help parents, community and government leaders make appropriate decisions on childhood immunization, has already been endorsed by more than 60 public [health](#) leaders from the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

It calls upon [major search engines](#) and social media organisations to better monitor the [vaccine information](#) they provide so that they can improve the identification of disproven or inaccurate false claims about [vaccine safety](#)—just as they do for sexually explicit, violent and threatening messages.

At the same time, advocacy groups, educators and [health professionals](#) should join forces to correct misleading vaccine information and disseminate reliable, [accurate information](#) via mass and social media and through trusted sources at all levels of society, including celebrities, faith-based leaders and parents.

Governments and policymakers should support laws that limit exemptions from mandatory vaccinations and treat childhood vaccination like other essential services such as police, firefighters and public sanitation, the statement also says.

"We are alarmed that the WHO this year declared vaccine hesitancy a top-ten international public health problem. This is a man-made, dangerous and wholly unnecessary crisis. We intend to keep up a steady drumbeat of accurate vaccine communications until the traditional public consensus in support of childhood immunization is restored," said Dr. Scott Ratzan, founding editor of the *Journal of Health Communication* and founder of the International Working Group (IWG) on Vaccination and Public Health Solutions.

Vaccines have prevented hundreds of millions of [infectious diseases](#), including polio, measles, hepatitis B and meningitis, saving up to 3 million lives yearly. Every US dollar spent on childhood immunization returns up to \$44 in benefits . However, immunization rates globally are threatened by misinformation spread by the 'anti-vax' movement. Vaccine coverage has waned in many populations, and the US and 34 countries in the WHO's European region no longer have the 95% immunization rate that provides the 'herd immunity' necessary to protect against highly contagious diseases such as measles.

Prof. Lawrence Gostin, Director of the WHO Collaborating Center on National and Global Health Law and co-director of the IWG, said: "The resurgence of potentially life-threatening diseases like measles, which the US Centers for Disease Control declared eliminated in the United States in 2000, undermines the integrity of childhood protections that thousands of dedicated scientists, doctors, and public health officials spent the better part of the last century putting in place. Parents do have rights to make informed decisions about vaccinating their children, but they do not have the right to place their children, or other children, at

risk of a serious infectious disease. We need to do a far better job of reaching out to [vaccine](#)-hesitant parents."

**More information:** *Journal of Health Communication* (2019).  
[www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10810730.2019.1622611](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10810730.2019.1622611)

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