

Expert: Vaccination myths must be debunked

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Credit: 123RF.com/Rice University

An analysis of anti-vaccine witness statements presented during the Texas Legislature's 2017 session revealed recurring misconceptions that need to be challenged, according to an expert at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

Kirstin Matthews, a fellow in science and technology policy in the Center for Health and Biosciences at the Baker Institute, is available to discuss the science and necessity of vaccinations with the media. She and Baker Institute graduate intern Melody Tan are the authors of two new issue briefs that examine the common anti-vaccine arguments and misconceptions presented during public hearings for two Texas House bills on vaccinations.

According to Matthews and Tan, the five recurring misconceptions are vaccines are ineffective, herd immunity is a myth, vaccines "shed" and cause the spread of [disease](#), the impacts of vaccine-preventable diseases are minor and vaccine-exempt children are not spreading disease. "Each of these myths is inaccurate and unscientific," the authors wrote.

"Furthermore, the witnesses failed to use accurate scientific data to justify them. The few witnesses who did try to cite research grossly misunderstood or misinterpreted the data."

Given these misconceptions, there is a clear need to increase awareness among policymakers and the public of vaccines' positive impact, the negative consequences of an undervaccinated population and how policies can help influence vaccination rates in Texas, the authors said.

"One way is to encourage broad public participation in discussions on vaccines that involve physicians, scientists, parents and students—especially those who are at risk by being around undervaccinated children," the authors wrote. "In addition, scientists and doctors should share and discuss publicly available data and research on vaccines and their impacts on [public health](#)."

The authors said that without strong public support for vaccines and [vaccine](#) research, Texas runs the risk of allowing more people to opt out for nonmedical reasons, thereby increasing the risk of [vaccine](#)-preventable disease.

"Vaccines are low-cost solutions to often expensive and debilitating illnesses," the authors wrote. "They reduce the public financial burden and increase public health. They are a critical tool for public health and should be encouraged and promoted by the state Legislature by increasing access, not disparaged by allowing myths to perpetuate unchallenged."

More information: Scientific Misconceptions and Myths Perpetuated in the 2017 Texas Legislative Session. www.bakerinstitute.org/media/f...chb-vaccinemyths.pdf

Medical Freedom, Privacy, and Fear of Discrimination: The 2017 Texas Legislative Session Anti-vaccine Arguments. www.bakerinstitute.org/media/f...accine-arguments.pdf

Provided by Rice University

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