



## Podcast Transcript

# "Don't Hesitate, Vaccinate!"

Recorded: October 25, 2019

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**Moderator:** Patti Bellock, served in the Governor's cabinet in Illinois as the director of the HealthCare and Family Services Agency and retired from serving as the first woman in the history of Illinois to be the deputy minority leader in the House of Representatives.

**Panelists:** Georgia State Senator Gloria Butler  
Dr. Deborah Wexler, Executive Director, Immunization Action Coalition  
Elaine O'Hara, Chief Commercial Officer, Sanofi Pasteur  
Erica DeWald, Director of Advocacy, Vaccinate Your Family

**Voiceover:** Welcome to the Women In Government Podcast. Whether discussing important issues or policies of the day, this is the place where lawmakers and decision-makers unite to get the conversation started.

**Patti Bellock:** The headlines say it all.

**Voiceover:** Measles outbreaks challenge public health systems. Sixteen cases of mumps have been reported at university. Unvaccinated child almost dies of tetanus. Northwest measles outbreak revives debate over vaccine laws. Measles is spiking around the globe. How worried should we be?

**Patti Bellock:** How worried should we be? That's just one question people have been asking over the past year. Another big question has been to vaccinate, or not to vaccinate? There are many reasons why people choose to vaccinate their families against preventable diseases. Vaccination promotes good public health and helps avoid a major disease outbreak. That's something we saw this year, with several measles outbreaks in large communities across the country, from Clark County, Washington, to Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Measles may have dominated the headlines, but other vaccine preventable diseases infected people of all ages - chicken pox, whooping cough, and tetanus. The previous flu season even stretched well into the spring this year.

Today in our country there are conversations regarding vaccinations going on everywhere from playgrounds to boardrooms by parents, medical professionals, and public policymakers. Recent news articles, such as the [one in the New York Times](#) have emphasized the importance of immunization as one of the most successful medical breakthroughs in saving lives and reducing illness. But at the same time, the vaccine landscape in America is changing, in part because their enormous success has made once common illnesses a rarity.

Today, there's a lot of misinformation circulating about the safety and necessity of vaccines, as well as fears about autism and the number of vaccines administered at once. As a result, vaccine preventable diseases have resurged in the United States, with measles and influenza continuing to be an enormous national problem every year.



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Hi, I'm Patti Bellock, I served in the Governor's cabinet in Illinois as the director of the HealthCare and Family Services Agency and retired from serving as the first woman in the history of Illinois to be the deputy minority leader in the House of Representatives. Thank you for listening to the latest Women In Government Podcast, Don't Hesitate, Vaccinate! Today, we're talking about vaccine confidence. Joining us to answer some important questions are Georgia State Senator Gloria Butler, who is the highest-ranking female in the Georgia Senate. She is also an avid champion of children's issues and works diligently to improve the public health system. Welcome, Senator Butler!

**Senator Butler:** Good afternoon, Patti! I'm happy to be joining you on this important issue of vaccines today.

**Patti Bellock:** Great! We also have with us Dr. Deborah Wexler, Executive Director of the national nonprofit organization the Immunization Action Coalition.

**Dr. Wexler:** Thank you so much for inviting me today!

**Patti Bellock:** Love to have you! I'd also like to welcome to our program Elaine O'Hara. She's the Chief Commercial Officer at Sanofi Pasteur.

**Elaine O'Hara:** Thank so much, Patti! It's great to be part of the panel today.

**Patti Bellock:** And finally our last guest, Erica DeWald. She's the Director of Advocacy at Vaccine Your Family, a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect people of all ages from vaccine preventable diseases.

**Erica DeWald:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Patti Bellock:** I'd also like to thank everyone who is listening and remind you to like or share our conversation. You can also email us by visiting [Women-In-Government-dot-org](http://Women-In-Government-dot-org).

We've all heard it on the news or read about it online - vaccine preventable diseases are on the rise. This creates enormous challenges for policymakers and medical providers charged with helping to preserve public health. On top of that, there are many parents and caregivers who are worried about their family's health. Let's get started!

Erica, for anyone who is nervous about vaccinating their family, including the vocal vaccine opponents, what do you have to say about all the information or misinformation that is readily accessible?

**Erica DeWald:** You know, it's not unusual to hear parents have questions about vaccines. In fact, it's become pretty normal. We question everything about our children's first years. What's the perfect car seat? Which baby food brand is best? So why wouldn't people ask questions about vaccines?

The issue really becomes where you are finding your answers to those questions. And it's not always easy to determine which are science-based sources. A lot of people end up turning to social media.

Unfortunately, there are a handful of people who share incorrect information about vaccines for their personal interests, whether it's they're making money off of it, they enjoy the attention that they get –



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but they often become major influencers on social media platforms. So they have the ability to spread this disinformation about vaccines far and wide.

Luckily several social media platforms have realized that disinformation on vaccines is traveling on their platforms in similar ways to political disinformation. So they're implementing a bunch of different solutions. They're changing their algorithms, they're including pop up boxes to push people towards good information about vaccines, and testing other effective ways to increase the visibility of science- and evidence-based information, which is really what we need to get to parents who have questions.

**Patti Bellock:** One of the most common causes of vaccine hesitancy among parents and caregivers stems from negative information they either read or heard in the media. Some of these people are louder than others.

Elaine, what is the real difference between vocal vaccine opponents and vaccine hesitant?

**Elaine DeWald:** So with so much misinformation circulating about vaccines, you know it's not surprising that the public needs help addressing questions. I think this is especially true for parents, and we know from company research that the majority of parents intend to vaccinate, but they often face a great deal of uncertainty and lack of information. This can be a particularly confusing time for parents during these early years, such as the two-month visit when immunizations are given for the first time.

So it's important to note that vocal vaccine opponents only represent a very small proportion of the population – probably less than one percent.

And overall, vaccination is still critical in terms of protecting health. The vast majority of the public sees the value of immunization, and they vaccinate themselves and their families.

**Patti Bellock:** Thank you, Elaine. Vaccines go through years of testing and are continually monitored for safety concerns. However, 70% of parents fear some form of side effect or reaction to a vaccine.

Dr. Wexler, can you share some of your knowledge to help arm legislators with the facts necessary to counter vocal vaccine opponents?

**Dr. Wexler:** Sure, I'd be happy to. First of all, vaccines have been the victims of their own success because most of the diseases that they prevent are rarely seen now. So we fail to appreciate vaccines. But regardless, as you say, legislators have to be ready to respond to vaccine opponents.

The thing I'd like to stress right now is that our vaccines very, very safe, and they are among the most rigorously tested medicinal products available in the United States, so they're extremely safe. And even after they're licensed and in use, we still as a nation have [four different safety monitoring systems](#) that operate on an ongoing basis to assure that they remain safe.

**Elaine O'Hara:** Yeah, and just to jump in, every batch of vaccines undergoes a rigorous quality control process from the manufacturer's perspective. And this accounts for up to 70% of the time needed to manufacture a vaccine.



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**Dr. Wexler:** And I'd like to add a few more points about side effects, because as you said, parents are concerned about side effects, and that's a very normal thing. But regarding any serious side effects, vaccines, like any medication, could cause a serious reaction, but with reactions that's an extremely rare occurrence. The most common side effects that we see when we give vaccines are pain and swelling at the injection site, and sometimes there can be a low grade fever. But these side effects are minor compared to the protection that vaccines offer in keeping us healthy, so our vaccines are very safe.

**Patti Bellock:** Thank you very much, Dr. Wexler. That was very informative. Almost all physicians encounter hesitancy. In fact, a [2015 Vaccine Hesitancy Study](#) found 77% of pediatricians encountered parents worried about vaccines causing autism or other neurological side effects.

Doctor, what do you have to say to those who think there is a link between certain vaccines and autism?

**Dr. Wexler:** Well, a lot of parents have heard that 20 year old myth that there is a link between vaccines and autism, but there is absolutely no connection between the two. That former doctor who promulgated that false story was [stripped of his medical license in the United Kingdom](#) because of his fraudulent research. But unfortunately, before that myth could be debunked, he scared millions of parents and once an alarm bell rings, that bell can't be unring.

Now since the time that he falsified his research and it was published, scientists studied the issue closely. Since then there have been 25 studies in 7 countries and on 3 continents looking at millions of patients that showed that [no links exist between vaccines and autism](#). And while all causes of autism are not known today, research over the past decade has shown that there is a strong role of genetics as the main cause of autism.

The bottom line is that it's so important that policymakers know the facts about how safe vaccines are and their value in protecting the health of the public when responding to those who say that vaccines aren't safe.

**Patti Bellock:** From what we heard, there's a lot of misinformation that we've talked about causing fear among parents and caregivers.

Elaine, where can the public and policymakers get reliable information and resources to give to their constituents on vaccines?

**Elaine O'Hara:** Yeah, you know that's a great question, and industry has a real critical role to play beyond providing safe and effective vaccines in reinforcing public vaccine confidence. We need to seamlessly align our communications with those of other stakeholders and healthcare practitioners and providers to help reinforce the good story of vaccines' benefits.

So Sanofi Pasteur has launched [Vaccines.com](#) - it's an educational resource for both consumers and healthcare providers to really set the record straight on vaccines and provide accurate information. This includes an electronic platform called ImmYOUunity 2.0 – it's our e-learning program designed to help healthcare providers improve vaccine recommendations, address questions, and to really create trust and improve timely vaccination rates.



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**Patti Bellock:** And here's a follow up question, Elaine - how can other outlets be more responsible with the health messages that are so important and that they're releasing to the public?

**Elaine O'Hara:** Yeah, great question. The media also has an important role to play as the main amplifier of messages today. Media serves as a barometer of truth in what is a post-truth world which is unfortunately swirling with a lot of misinformation and fake news. They have an important role and responsibility in public health.

The science says vaccinations and vaccines work, and so providing a voice in the media to vaccine deniers is false balance and triggers unwarranted and unwanted concerns in people's minds. And this can transform into disease outbreaks if people decide to stop vaccinating – look at the measles outbreaks all around us lately.

**Patti Bellock:** It's not just the pharmaceutical industry and media outlets facing scrutiny regarding vaccine hesitancy. Legislators also play an extremely significant role in reshaping the conversation on vaccination. Before we get into the specifics regarding Senator Butler's state of Georgia and my work in Illinois, it's important to highlight why laws do work.

Erica, can you tell us a little bit about Vaccinate Your Family and how laws covering entire school populations were game changers?

**Erica DeWald:** Absolutely! [Vaccinate Your Family](#) was founded by Former First Lady of the United States Rosalynn Carter and her good friend Former First Lady of Arkansas Betty Bumpers. Our organization was founded in 1991, but Mrs. Bumpers and Mrs. Carter actually began working together as governors' spouses in the 1970s. Mrs. Bumpers had personally seen as a school teacher children pass away from vaccine-preventable diseases, and they realized that something needed to be done.

And so they looked around and they realized that states that had introduced school entry requirements had as many as half the cases of measles that those states that hadn't, and so they decided to work with each other and work across the country to institute similar laws in other states.

Later that decade, at the end of the 1970s as Mrs. Carter was in the White House, an analysis of the states was done with the highest and lowest vaccination rates, and it showed that laws that covered the entire school population, not just kindergarteners, had the least cases of measles.

So from that moment forward, Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Bumpers spent much of their time working to ensure each state had school entry requirements.

**Patti Bellock:** Well this year we've seen House Bills passed in [California](#), [Washington](#), [Maine](#) and [New York](#) removing some form of personal and/or religious belief exemptions for schools. [Georgia](#) allows for a medical exemption issued by a treating physician or a local health department. It also grants religious exemptions. As for my state of [Illinois](#), we only allow exemptions due to religious beliefs.



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Looking at some of the important numbers, as of October 1st this year, Illinois had 2.1 million students and about 49,000 were unvaccinated. Faith-based reasons have increased and we have just over 19,000 religious exemptions. That data is up from 13,000 just a few years ago.

As for Senator Butler's state of Georgia, based on 2017 data – more than 90% of infants were immunized for TDaP, measles, chicken pox, and Hib by 24 months. Senator, your state of Georgia is at an increased risk for infectious diseases.

Atlanta is home to the world's busiest airport – Hartsfield-Jackson. People pass through all the time, traveling to and from places with different health protocols. Your state has been touched by the measles outbreak. However, according to the [Georgia Department of Health](#), vaccine-preventable disease levels are at or near record lows.

Can you tell us what your state is doing to prevent the spread of vaccine preventable diseases? Because clearly, it's working in Georgia.

**Senator Butler:** Thank you so much for that question, Patti, because we have some great programs. One of the programs that I want to mention is [GRITS, the Georgia Registry of Immunization Transactions and Services](#). That's a state immunization registry designed to collect and maintain current immunization records. It provides a single data resource for all community immunization partners. All providers are a part of it; they submit accurate vaccination requirements, there's data sharing between schools – for instance colleges, childcare facilities, public schools and healthcare providers; and it also notifies parents when shots are due. This program has helped eliminate some of the common issues with immunizations compliance such as losing forms and paperwork, and it also helps school nurses facilitate immunization compliance in the school system.

One of the other great programs we have is Vaccines for Children. The [Georgia Vaccines for Children Program](#) (VFC) is a 100% federally funded program that provides public purchased vaccines for eligible children. Vaccines available through this program are those recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (the CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Vaccines are distributed at no charge to VFC-enrolled providers and administered to eligible patients. The Georgia VFC currently has 922 private physician offices and 204 public health clinics enrolled in the program.

Another program that we have is the Adult Vaccine Program, which is referred to as AVP, and it provides vaccines to doctors' offices for administration to adults 19 years old or older who are uninsured or underinsured. Participation has increased from 11 private providers in 2015 to 20 private providers in 2019, and all health departments in Georgia have access to these vaccines for use in their adult patient population as well.

And then we have the [School Based Flu Program](#) – and I know we're going to talk about it a little later – but this program was initiated in 2010 to provide influenza vaccines to students in the school settings. Currently, around 58,000 doses are administered annually, and 15 of our 18 health districts participate in the program.



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In 2017, the legislature passed [HB 198](#) that requires local school systems to provide information about the influenza vaccine (an addition to the code which required schools to share information about the meningococcal vaccine).

**Patti Bellock:** Thank you very much, Senator Butler, and I’ll just make a few comments to join in with you on what we’re doing in Illinois because you covered so many programs that are outstanding. We too have a lot of those programs or similar, and just to point out that when I talked to one of our Public Health Directors that this was a top priority of our state Public Health Agency – vaccinations.

Our state has invested a lot of time and effort in public awareness campaigns statewide through every single county in the state with information and education on vaccines, which is extremely important for parents and total communities.

Another issue that Illinois – because we’re such a rural state – has done is to increase the access to vaccines, which is important that a lot of people in the cities – the major cities such as Chicago don’t even understand as to how important it is to reach the local communities in the rural areas so every child is vaccinated.

Our state (and I did as Director of HFS) have worked on billing issues to make sure with the federal government going along with the state government that all children, especially in the Medicaid program, are vaccinated.

And Senator, I know you’ve been a very active legislator, so I’d just like to ask you how you talk to your constituents about vaccine safety? And do you have any personal stories?

**Senator Butler:** Oh, that’s a great question. I do have a personal story, and it starts at home. I’ll start with my family first. I am a grandmother of two and a great-grandmother of seven, so I definitely need to start with my own family first. I start with my staff, make sure they’re vaccinated and they have their shots that they’re supposed to have at whatever age they are, and then I read a great story on Facebook the other day. A woman penned a story about getting vaccinated, and she said it’s not always about you but it’s about the people that are around you. It’s about your community, it’s about someone other than you, and I thought it was a great story. She talked about the grandparents that are not able to fight off the illnesses that they get when they are a certain age, and I thought that was magnificent.

**Patti Bellock:** That is – that’s great. And I have two also – personal stories that go way back to when I was a child back in the mid-1950s, and I was at a local park with four of my close friends in the afternoon just playing on the playground equipment. Later that evening my parents got a call from my friend’s mom and dad saying that she became paralyzed when she got home from the park, was taken to the pediatrician and was told that she had polio. And they told us that we should contact our pediatrician even though the polio vaccine was just coming on the market, the other three of us were taken to our pediatricians and given that vaccine. And that woman was paralyzed for the rest of her life with polio.

My second other person story was my cousin who contracted bulbar polio around the same time and had to live part of his life in an iron lung before he did die of that disease. So those stories are very



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personal, but they find their way into this because that was long ago. Now we've talked about how successful we have been because of vaccines that once-terrible diseases like polio have now become a rarity.

So, we're finding out how vaccines help us avoid widespread disease or in a worse scenario, a massive pandemic.

Senator, do you happen to know what other states are doing to increase the vaccine confidence in the general public, such as what your state has done?

**Senator Butler:** Oh, I did look at some other states. In response to recent outbreaks in their states, California and New York passed legislation banning religious exemptions from vaccinations. Maine also banned religious exemptions but phased it in for 2020.

Other states including [Alabama](#) and [Rhode Island](#) took up banning the religious exemptions in 2019 but the bills failed. [Florida](#) already has legislation filed for 2020.

[West Virginia](#) and [Mississippi](#) have never allowed religious or personal belief exemptions. Their vaccination rates have remained the highest in the nation in schoolchildren.

California saw a spike in medical exemptions after banning religious exemptions. They believed that some physicians were willing to supplement the lack of religious exemptions by certifying medical exemptions for parents who wished it. In 2019, the legislature passed a law tightening the process for medical exemptions in response to this trend.

**Patti Bellock:** Thank you very much. That was really informative. And moving on to what we've been talking about already, there are countless questions about vaccines and how they're administered.

The [Immunization Action Coalition \(IAC\)](#) and Vaccinate Your Family are non-profit organizations working to increase immunization rates. Erica, we've already heard about your organization, so Dr. Wexler, can you tell us about IAC?

**Dr. Wexler:** I'd love to, Patti. The mission of the Immunization Action Coalition is to increase immunization rates and prevent disease, and we do that by providing health professionals in the public with vaccine information about the delivery of safe and effective vaccines and general vaccine education. We also spend a lot of time working on national and state policy issues, so that's another area of expertise for our organization. We have hundreds of free ready-to-print education materials on our website that are ready to download and available to health professionals and the general public.

**Patti Bellock:** So that's what I was going to ask you – a little more information – both Dr. Wexler and Erica, as to really what types of tools are available, especially to legislators and other policymakers who need to respond, sometimes immediately, to vaccine challenges and science questions?

**Dr. Wexler:** I'll start with that one. When it comes to finding answers to questions about vaccines, I would say a legislator's foremost point of contact would be their state health department's immunization division. [State health departments](#) have staff who are so well versed in vaccines and



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responding to questions from the public about vaccines, so it’s great to have your contacts identified there and work with them directly. The Immunization Action Coalition and Vaccinate Your Family are both non-profit organizations. Both are organizations that work with legislators to help them provide information to the public about vaccine policy issues and vaccine information.

Erica, would you like to add to that further?

**Erica DeWald:** Yeah, great points, Deborah. I love working with state health departments, and also you know it’s hard – there’s so much disinformation online, it moves quickly through social media – it can be hard for any of us to keep up with the things that people have questions about. And so I could also encourage folks to check out of course [IAC](#) and the [Vaccinate Your Family website](#) where we have a great little Q&A about the latest and greatest myths but also sources like the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. They have a vaccine education center with great science-based information about everything from ingredients in vaccines all the way to fact sheets on individual vaccines. So definitely check them out. I would also encourage the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). The CDC has all the information you could ever possibly want to ask about vaccines right on one handy website.

**Patti Bellock:** Elaine, were there any other comments you’d like to make to what Dr. Wexler and Erica have just given us?

**Elaine O’Hara:** Yeah, one additional comment. In addition to the Vaccines.com website I mentioned earlier on, we also always encourage both legislators and the public to use available public health resources, like Erica mentioned, from groups like the Centers for Disease Control. Their websites always have up-to-date information regarding prevalence and incidence of circulating disease – literally up to the moment information. Then of course there’s the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) for your pediatric patients or for your children. They always have plenty of educational information to help inform parents who may be having anxiety around what vaccinations to support, etc. So those are just to reiterate a couple of other places to go for legislators and for the public to understand the nature and provide education around vaccinations.

**Patti Bellock:** Great. Well thank so much, Elaine and Erica and Dr. Wexler, for that specific information which is very, very helpful to people.

All this information is crucial for lawmakers to have in hand in order to shape policy. Senator Butler, how about if we discuss the significant role legislators play in the conversation regarding vaccination. I know especially in the last two years it’s been very prevalent on many floors of the Houses of Representatives and Senators in the local states.

Would you like to comment on some steps that you and other state leaders can make to help people live healthier and happier lives?

**Senator Butler:** One of the first things we have to figure out is how the state can provide more resources – how we can have more access and reduce costs. And some of the things that I’ve thought about over time is how we can partner with organizations that provide health services. For example, the



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CVS Health program – it's a commitment to help improve access to healthcare for all Americans, and I'm very pleased once again to offer, along with CVS, [Project Health](#). It's our annual free health service campaign, and they come to your community, and they offer a free screening for different illnesses. And sometimes things are found when you have people come by and take advantage of the free services. And we can also partner with churches other community groups – so those are just a few things that we can do to help our constituents and other people live healthier and healthier lives.

**Patti Bellock:** I agree with you, and I think especially when I was a legislator, I think the personal commitment of legislators to educate themselves; keep resources, pamphlets in their local district offices not just in their capitol offices so that people can easily get a hold of that information – legislators can be active advocates reinforcing their own personal commitment to vaccination, which is pretty much a strong vote of confidence for their constituency, I would think.

Also, I can't stress enough how important it is to serve your constituents locally with this information because the majority of constituents do not go to the capitol. A lot do not go on websites, but they do call their legislators when they have an issue, and this is a very personal issue to many parents who have concerns about vaccinating. Make sure to allow time for discussions with constituents, and listen carefully to their concerns when they do visit their district offices, which a lot of people do. I used to have a lot of people come into my offices with concerns, especially in the last few years.

We've talked about providing resources, given a lot of information on that, and we appreciate all those national groups, but also to make people aware of resources right in their own district. And also make them aware that in Illinois, our laws on vaccinations and your laws in Georgia, specifically what they are, and another very important role is the implementation in their school districts because parents need to be aware of that.

In the remaining time that we have today, we thought that we would talk about the flu, as we are now entering the influenza season and seeing signs all over about getting flu shots.

Dr. Wexler, can you give us information on why vaccination is our best defense against the flu?

**Dr. Wexler:** Yes, I'd be happy to talk about that. According to the CDC and every professional society that represents pediatricians, family doctors, internal medicine specialists, nurses across the whole gamut of medical organizations, we all acknowledge that influenza vaccination is the best way to protect our country and our world against influenza. There is no better way.

And even now, as we are entering the flu season, it's really important for everyone to be vaccinated with flu vaccine. The vaccine is recommended for babies but older than 6 months of age, children, teens, all adults, and the elderly, so everyone should be vaccinated. By getting vaccinated you're not only protecting yourself but you're protecting those infants who are too young to be vaccinated – those babies who are under 6 months of age – and people who can't be vaccinated because of a medical condition such as certain types of cancers. So by getting vaccinated yourself you're protecting people who can't be vaccinated.



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The fact is that during last year's flu season, 136 children died from influenza and 80% of those children weren't vaccinated, so we need to do a better job of vaccinating our children and everyone in our country. And we often think that it's just the children who are ill to begin with who are the ones who die of flu, but in fact half of the children who die of influenza are healthy children who have no illness to begin with - who actually die of influenza, and they're healthy kids. And also the children who die aren't necessarily just babies or toddlers. More than half of the children who die of influenza are 5 years of age and older, so we have to make sure that all children are vaccinated and in fact all people are vaccinated who are 6 months of age and older.

But in fact we know that flu vaccine isn't perfect, and it won't prevent all cases of flu. But it will prevent many cases, and it will also reduce the risk of getting serious complications if you should get infected. So those serious complications can include pneumonia, bacterial infections, that can lead to hospitalization and even death. So it's super important for everyone to be vaccinated.

For people over 65 years of age; patients with chronic health conditions who are younger than 65 and older than 65; people with heart conditions, lung conditions, asthma; vaccination is even more imperative because people who are older than 65 and people with health conditions are more likely to have complications.

**Erica DeWald:** And if I could add – another group that we need to be thinking about is pregnant women. Pregnant women are also at greater risk of complications both for themselves and their babies, and recent data has indicated that women of color are less likely to be offered the flu vaccine and then even less like to accept the flu vaccine when pregnant, so we need to also be talking about some of the disparities that we're seeing in flu acceptance.

**Dr. Wexler:** I want to agree with Erica that pregnant women are very important to be vaccinated because they're not only protecting themselves when they're getting vaccinated but they're also protecting their newborn babies. And as we know those babies from birth to 6 months of age have no other protection other than the immunization of their moms when the women are pregnant and the family members who surround them.

**Patti Bellock:** Well as Dr. Wexler mentioned, annual vaccination is the best way to help protect against the flu and reduce the risk of serious complications, yet immunization rates as you pointed out in all age groups are below the [Healthy People 2020 goals](#).

So Doctor, what is the real bottom line here? How can legislators and others take action in educating themselves on the benefits of vaccination and improving this situation?

**Dr. Wexler:** Well the bottom line is that it's true that influenza vaccines have their own set of vaccine confidence challenges including so many myths out there that the vaccine doesn't work or the vaccine causes the flu – none of which are true - but it's more crucial than ever that legislators and parents and providers arm themselves with knowledge to address vaccine hesitancy concerns. Avoid getting your information from social media about the dangers of flu. Your health professional is the best source of



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vaccine information and accurate vaccine information. It's best to go to reliable resources, and remember that vaccines are for people of all ages, not just for children.

And as we talked about a little bit earlier, there are many resources available and many organizations who can help you find reliable sources.

[State Immunization Programs](#), [state websites](#), [Centers for Disease Control](#), [Immunization Action Coalition](#), [Vaccinate Your Family](#), [Vaccine Education Centers](#) – and I know that this information is going to be posted on the Women In Government website, so I urge all listeners to go to the Women In Government website and get the listing of accurate, reliable sources of vaccine information.

**Patti Bellock:** Your expertise has been invaluable, thank you.

And according to the CDC, it's estimated that 79,000 people died from the flu during the 2017-2018 season. Again, what you've provided, Dr. Wexler - if you'd like more information about the flu shot, you can listen to [one of our other episodes entirely dedicated to questions about the influenza vaccination](#).

And now we're getting towards the end of the program. I'd like to provide some time for closing statements for all of our wonderful guest. You have just been terrific. So I probably thought we would start with Senator Butler. Would that be all right with you, Senator Butler?

**Senator Butler:** Yes, it certainly is. Let me start by just saying that vaccines are important. I think that being vaccinated for all preventable diseases and choosing to get your yearly flu shot are good decisions that help prevent our population from being infected by preventable diseases. And I'd like to say to my age group, you seniors – get your shingles shot, pneumonia, and your flu shot. And the last thing I'd like to say – don't hesitate, vaccinate!

**Patti Bellock:** Great. Dr. Wexler, any final thoughts?

**Dr. Wexler:** My husband and I went out together this morning and got our flu shots, so I urge everyone listening to make quick appointments with a nurse at your clinic or find a walk-in clinic – go to a pharmacy, go to a supermarket – flu vaccines are available in many, many places. And please remind your family members and your friends to get vaccinated too – the sooner, the better! November and December are great times to get vaccinated. Even if you delay, you can still get vaccinated in January or even February, but please don't hesitate, vaccinate!

**Patti Bellock:** Erica, how about you?

**Erica DeWald:** You know, I have two children under the age of 5. They are fully vaccinated according to the [ACIP recommended schedule](#), but I'm in a really fortunate position that I know really good sources of information for vaccines. I know the right people to go to and ask. If you have questions about vaccines, don't hesitate to ask them, but do be critical of your sources. Do think about what search terms you're using to find information about vaccines. Don't necessarily Google something like "safety of vaccines" or "vaccine dangers," and do think critically about the sources that you're looking at for



## Podcast Transcript “Don’t Hesitate, Vaccinate!”

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vaccine information. And please do turn to [reputable sources like the ones listed on the Women In Government website](#).

**Patti Bellock:** And finally, Elaine, do you have some last comments?

**Elaine O’Hara:** Yes, this was a great panel, and I really enjoyed it. I hope that all of the listeners understand the information that we were able to provide today, and I’m just going to reiterate a couple of points that were made in my closing remarks. As Dr. Wexler said, vaccination is really the best way to protect against preventable diseases across all age ranges – whether it’s an infant, whether it’s an adolescent, whether you’re an adult, or whether you’re in your senior years. Vaccination is incredibly important, and it does protect lives, and it protects communities as we heard earlier on. As was also said, it’s incredibly important to understand the references and the sources. Really rely on credible sources of information to provide accurate information regarding vaccinations, and as has been said those have all been listed already. So please, if you haven’t been immunized, go get immunized because again you’re protecting not only you and your families but also your communities as well.

**Patti Bellock:** I think everyone would agree we’ve had a fantastic conversation today on how vaccination promotes good public health and helps prevent the spread of contagious diseases like measles and influenza. The CDC estimates that vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2018 in the U.S. will prevent more than 400 million illnesses and save thousands of lives, like everyone on the panel has pointed out. That’s why it’s important to talk to your healthcare provider about vaccinations today.

I’d like to thank all of our tremendous guests for joining us today on the latest Women In Government Podcast. You have just been wonderful and so informative. I think that this will really help change people’s lives.

I’d also like to say thank you to all of our listeners for taking time out of your busy schedule to hear this important discussion. Don’t forget to subscribe to or like or share our podcast. You can also email us by visiting [Women-In-Government-dot-org](#).

**Voiceover:** You’ve been listening to the Women In Government Podcast, a resource made available for those interested in discussing important issues and policies of the day. For more information please visit our website at [www.womeningovernment.org](#).

~End~



Women In Government (WIG) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization serving women state legislators nationwide with policy-driven education, in-depth leadership training, and coalition-building networking opportunities.

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