



Gallatin City-County Health Department

To Parents and Residents in the Gallatin Valley,

We feel that it is our responsibility as health care providers in this community to come together to encourage parents to protect all children from communicable diseases that remain a real and present threat. The low rate of childhood immunization in Montana presents a public health problem that increases the risk of serious disease outbreaks.

We know that vaccines save tens of thousands of lives each year. We also know that there are some parents in our community who are skeptical about the safety or effectiveness of vaccines. While we sympathize with those concerns, we stand together now as health professionals to say the following:

- Vaccines are among the safest, most effective medical advances ever developed.
- The health benefits of vaccines far outweigh any perceived safety concerns. The scientific evidence in this regard is clear.
- Vaccines continue to protect us from diseases that can re-emerge to cause widespread epidemics.
- Everyone in the community benefits from the immunity derived from vaccines, and each time a parent makes a conscious choice not to vaccinate they are chipping away at that immunity. They are putting their own child's health at risk, as well as the health of every child in the community.

We understand that there can be some anxiety and confusion about vaccines. We hear your concerns and we sympathize. But we would not be doing our jobs if we did not push back to dispel myths that we know are not based in science and fact. We know, for example, that careful and reputable scientific researchers have found no link between autism and vaccines or vaccine preservatives¹. A 1998 medical article that initially suggested such a link was retracted², and the doctor who published the research was stripped of his medical license for unethical behavior³. Still, some continue to make this an issue.

Instead of fearing vaccines, remember the terrible toll exacted by the diseases that can now be prevented by vaccines. We must not forget that prior to a vaccine, pertussis (or whooping cough) killed an average of 4,000 Americans per year. Before a vaccine was developed, diphtheria killed up to 3,000 people every year in the U.S. alone⁴. These diseases have not disappeared, they are being held at bay by vaccines. In 2010, California reported 8,383 cases of pertussis, which included 10 infant deaths⁵. California state health officials declared a widespread epidemic. Diphtheria killed more than 4,000

people during the 1990's after the Soviet Union dissolved and mass vaccination programs failed⁶. Those deaths were preventable.

We are writing this letter now because we believe that vaccines, and our community's willingness to unite behind a comprehensive immunization effort, are crucial to preventing disease outbreaks in our community in the future. Our entire community benefits from successful vaccination efforts; and our entire community can be put at risk if those efforts fail.

For these reasons, we urge you to vaccinate your children, for their health and for the health of our community.

Sincerely,

Acorn Pediatrics:

Susan Daniels, MD
Sheila Idzerda, MD
Kathryn Lowe, MD
Christine Hodgson, PNP
Tory Katz, MD

Belgrade Clinic:

Heather Kjerstad, MD
James Cleary, MD
David B King, MD

Bozeman Clinic:

Gabor Benda, MD
David McLaughlin, MD
Larry W Sonnenberg, MD
Heather Wheeler, MD
Christine Mitchell, MD
Steve Roberts, DO

Bozeman Creek Family Health:

Sarah Bronsky, MD
Andrea Cady, MD
Hanly Burton, DO
Leah Anderson, MD
Jeannette Waldron, MD

Community Health Partners:

Deb Kern, FNP
Amy Berghold, FNP
Liesl Pessl, FNP
Kendall Parks, PA-C
Justin Eisel, MD
Christina Meyers, MD

Family Practice Associates:

Tracy Fairbanks, MD
Luke Omohundro, MD
Thomas Hildner, MD
Colette Kirchhoff, MD
Cathy Grace, MD
Larry Walker, PA-C

Four Corners Health Care:

Marie Mitchell, PNP, FNP

Medical Associates:

James Feist, MD
Charleen A McInnis, MD
Juliet Hansen, MD
Michael J Blake, MD
Pepper Henyon, MD
Mark Hodgson, MD
Todd Harris, DO
Terry Edwards, MD
John Patterson, MD
Lisa Gushwa, MD
Joseph Sofianek, MD
Connie Hahn, DO

Three Rivers Clinic:

Kristin Johnson, NP
Jennifer Sofie, NP

¹ Price C, Thompson W, et al. Sep 13, 2010. Prenatal and Infant Exposure to Thimerosal From Vaccines and Immunoglobulins and Risk of Autism. *Pediatrics*. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/peds.2010-0309v1.pdf>

² Harris, Gardiner. February 2, 2010. Journal Retracts 1998 Paper Linking Autism to Vaccines. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/03/health/research/03lancet.html>

³ Burns, John F. May 24, 2010. British Medical Council Bars Doctor Who Linked Vaccine With Autism. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/health/policy/25autism.html>

⁴ Roush S, Murphy M. Historical Comparison of Morbidity and Mortality for Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in the United States. *JAMA*, Vol. 298 No 18, Nov. 14, 2007.

⁵ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011. Pertussis (Whooping Cough); Outbreaks. Retrieved March 8, 2011, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/outbreaks.html>

⁶ Vitek C, Wharton M. Diphtheria in the Former Soviet Union: Reemergence of a Pandemic Disease. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, Vol 4 No. 4, Oct. to Dec 1998.