

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Vaccines, Trust, and Our Responsibility to Florida's Children

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Across Florida, nurses are seeing a concerning trend. More parents are delaying or declining routine childhood immunizations, and statewide vaccination rates among kindergarten students have declined from approximately 94% in 2019 to about 88% in the 2024–2025 school year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024; WUSF Public Media, 2025). At the same time, religious exemption requests continue to rise, reflecting growing vaccine hesitancy among some families (Florida Department of Health, 2025).

As President of the Florida Nurses Association, I strongly support the evidence-based position of the American Academy of Pediatrics that routine childhood immunizations remain one of the safest and most effective public health interventions ever developed.

Nurses see this issue up close. We administer vaccines, answer parents' questions, and care for children when preventable illnesses occur. What we are seeing is not simply refusal. It is uncertainty. Many parents are trying to navigate conflicting information while making decisions they believe are best for their children.

The decline in vaccination rates matters because community protection depends on maintaining high coverage. Public health experts generally note that approximately 95% vaccination coverage is needed to prevent outbreaks of highly contagious diseases such as measles (CDC, 2024). When vaccination rates fall below that threshold, the risk of outbreaks increases.

Florida pediatricians and nurses are already expressing concern that declining immunization rates could lead to the reemergence of vaccine-preventable diseases that had become rare in clinical practice (WUSF Public Media, 2025).

The Florida Nurses Association believes three priorities should guide the path forward:

Parents deserve clear, science-based information delivered with respect. Vaccines continue to demonstrate a strong safety record through decades of monitoring and research.

Children with medical vulnerabilities depend on high vaccination rates. Immunization is not only an individual decision but also a community protection strategy.

Healthcare professionals must remain trusted sources of information. That requires listening carefully, addressing concerns directly, and maintaining relationships even when families are hesitant.

Public discussion about vaccines has become increasingly influenced by policy debates. Regardless of politics, the nursing profession remains guided by prevention, patient safety, and scientific evidence.

The message from Florida nurses is simple. Vaccines prevent suffering, they prevent hospitalizations, and they protect the most vulnerable among us. The health of Florida's children should remain a shared responsibility. Nurses will continue to advocate for prevention, education, and informed decision-making because protecting children's health is not about politics. It is about our professional duty to protect the health of our residents and our commitment to messaging evidence-based truth to the communities we serve. ■

References

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