**Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor**

1. Make it relevant: Respond to a specific story, article, or timely topic. It could be a positive or negative reaction to a story. Or it could focus on a call to action related to vaccinations.
2. Make it timely: If responding to a story, send your letter within a few days of publication. Or if you’re focusing on an urgent need, such as a disease outbreak, act quickly so medicine is one of the first voices heard.
3. Make it personal: Include your story or someone else’s that relates to the topic.
4. Localize it: Explain why fellow local residents should care or find it important. Include statistics, if possible.
5. Check your facts: Make sure you have a source to back up any statistics or facts.
6. Focus on one topic: Build a strong case to support your main point. For example, talk about getting a flu shot in the fall/winter, rather than talking about all recommended vaccinations.
7. Keep it short: Check your local paper or magazine for word limits. Most request short letters of 150 words or less. If you have a personal relationship with a local newspaper editor, you might consider writing a longer commentary to submit as an op-ed. Again, check your paper; those often cap at 625-650 words.
8. Follow submission guidelines: Find where and how to submit letters in the printed publication or online (usually in the “Contact Us” section). And be sure you send all the information requested.
9. Follow up: If you haven’t heard from the publication or seen your letter within three or four days, ask if it was received and when they plan to publish your letter. And when you letter runs, a thank-you is always welcome.

**Vaccination Talking Points**

**General**

1. Vaccines are important, safe, and effective.
2. [Vaccinations are needed across the lifespan](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/index.html). Vaccinations to protect from 14 diseases are recommended from birth through age 6, and at least four more vaccinations are needed in adolescence. Adults may need as many as 10 vaccinations. Patients should check with their doctor to see which vaccinations they need.
3. The World Health Organization named vaccine hesitancy as one of the top public health threats in 2019.
4. [Nonmedical exemptions](https://www.dshs.texas.gov/immunize/coverage/schools/) to vaccinations in Texas have increased 3,044% – from 2,314 in 2003-04 to 72,743 in 2019-20.
5. The best way to keep up with your vaccinations is through a vaccination registry. In Texas, that is [ImmTrac2](http://www.immtrac.com/), and it is available for anyone.

**Childhood**

1. [Properly vaccinating all children born in the United States](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/protecting-children.html) between 1994 and 2018 would prevent more than 419 million cases of disease during their lifetime and 936,000 deaths.
2. [1,282 measles cases](https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html) were reported in the U.S. in 2019 (22 cases in Texas), the most cases since 1994 and since measles was declared eliminated in 2000.
3. No scientific evidence or study proves a direct link between vaccines and autism or any other behavior disorder.

**Influenza**

1. [Flu vaccination](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/index.html) is recommended annually for anyone aged 6 months and up.
2. [Flu-related illness](https://dshs.texas.gov/idcu/disease/influenza/surveillance/) claimed the lives of more than 10,000 Texans during the 2018-19 flu season.

**Other**

1. Human papillomavirus vaccination (HPV) [prevents 90% of HPV-related cancers](https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/cancer.html), including cervical and head and neck.
2. More than [34,000 HPV cancers](https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/cancer.html) are diagnosed every year in the U.S.
3. The [shingles vaccination](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/shingles/public/shingrix/index.html) can prevent more than 90% of shingles cases in adults.
4. Texas law requires students entering college to get a meningococcal vaccine, which prevents several types of meningitis and blood infections.
5. [Facts about vaccine-preventable diseases](https://www.texmed.org/TalkVPD/) for children and adults

**Key Educational Times (potential times to submit your letter)**

1. National Infant Immunization Week in April
2. National Immunization Awareness Month in August
3. Influenza Awareness Day on Oct. 1 in Texas
4. National Influenza Vaccination Week in late fall/early winter