

## Handout A: Instructions

Congratulations! You have been elected to the United States House of Representatives! Today you will vote on a bill that focuses on vaccinating school children.

### **Step 1: Read the bill.**

Vaccinate All Children Act (H. R. 2232)

Summary from the Library of Congress: This bill amends the Public Health Service Act to prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services from awarding grants to public entities of a state for preventive health service programs unless the state requires each student in public elementary or secondary school to be vaccinated in accordance with the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. The bill provides an exception for students whose health would be endangered by vaccination in the opinion of a physician conforming to the accepted standard of medical care.

Read the full text in the source pack or online: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2232/text>

Just to be sure you are clear on what the bill says, **write a quick summary below** stating what would happen if the bill was passed:

## **Step 2: Research**

You have received hundreds of letters from people in your state who do not want this bill passed, and you have received hundreds of letters from people in your state who believe this bill is important for public health.

Should the federal government require parents to vaccinate their children in order to attend school?

In the late 1990s, a medical journal published an article by Andrew Wakefield. Wakefield linked vaccinations to autism. Autism is a condition of the brain that affects people's ability to communicate with others. Wakefield's article caused many parents to stop vaccinating their children.

Years later, an official medical board found that Wakefield had committed fraud. That means he was dishonest in his research for the article. His doctor's license was taken away. The medical journal retracted ("unpublished") the article. Doctors who had supported Wakefield's research no longer supported him.

The U.S. Government continued to address the issue.

**1. Read Source B:** Recognizing the importance of vaccinations and immunizations in the United States. (H. Res. 117)

Notice first that it is a resolution, not a bill. A resolution is a statement that Congress considers important. It could be a message Congress wants the public to know. But it does not have the force of law. In other words, it cannot be enforced.

Knowing this, **answer the questions below.**

What seems to be the most important message Congress wants the public to know in this resolution?

What does the resolution say about children and vaccines?

Why do you think this is a resolution and not a bill? Could it be enforced if it was a bill that became law? Why or why not?

**2. Read Source C:** Summary of Article by Andrew Wakefield, et al.

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(97\)11096-0/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(97)11096-0/abstract)

Don't worry about understanding all of the medical vocabulary, just note what the article is suggesting about vaccinations and medical problems.

What is this source?

What did you notice about the source that seemed out of place?

What is important about this source?

### **Step 3: Discuss and Decide**

Though scientific evidence has so far shown that there is no link between autism and vaccines, there are people in your state who think that it is the right of parents to make all decisions about their child's medical care and treatment, including vaccinations. They disagree with HR 2232. They argue that their state should not be punished if it decides to allow parents to choose not to vaccinate their children. They do not want to risk their children's health, even if a vaccine does not cause autism. Vaccines still have risk of causing severe allergic reactions in rare cases. In cases even more rare, they can cause death.

Others support HR 2232. They believe that the federal government should encourage states to require vaccinations. If their state decides not to give parents the choice, then that is a good thing. Vaccinations of healthy children help protect the few children who cannot be vaccinated or who have no immunities. Parents could still opt out of vaccinations if a doctor determines that their child has a serious health risk from vaccines.

It is important to think about all sides of the issue. Here are some **questions to consider** as you deliberate:

- How important is it that HR 2232 be based on scientific evidence?
- How important is it that HR 2232 be based on the rights of parents to decide their own children's health?

Now you will get together with some other members of Congress to discuss the bill.

#### **In your group:**

1. Discuss and determine the best argument for opposing the bill:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Discuss and determine the best argument for supporting the bill:

3. Take a quick vote to see where everyone in your group is leaning (support or oppose).

4. Based on all of the evidence and the discussion, state and support **your own** position: