



University of Vermont
Center for Community News

Assignment Template: Covering vaccine policy changes

The Center for Community News' mission is to grow and support partnerships between college reporting programs and local news outlets. CCN has created a series of sample templates for faculty to give to students to contribute local news to their community. Faculty are welcome to use any and all of these and amend them as they see fit for their classes. For questions about this template, contact CCN Program Manager Sarah Gamard at scbgamard@gmail.com.

Notes for Faculty

WHAT: In this assignment, students will cover how changes in policies or recommendations around vaccines are impacting their community.

WHY: This assignment will teach students how to cover one of the most contentious health issues in recent history. Together, they will track data, gather research, interview health sources, and talk to residents. Students will learn how to contextualize national news in ways that help residents understand its impact on their everyday lives. They'll find information across several sources and report on multiple perspectives of an issue.

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE: This beginner-to-intermediate assignment is best used for localizing a national news story about vaccines, from new and controversial recommendations on immunizations for children to vaccine mandates in your community. Students should have some experience with man-on-the-street interviews. They can work on this assignment in pairs or small groups.

EXAMPLE STORIES:

[New Mexico doctors express concerns over CDC panel's vaccine policy meeting](#), by Margaret O'Hara, Santa Fe New Mexican, Sept. 17, 2025

[Vermont Department of Health issues broad guidance on vaccines for respiratory viruses and extends pharmacy access for Covid-19 booster](#), by Olivia Gieger, VTDigger.org, Sept. 18, 2025

[How do you get a COVID vaccine in New Jersey? Here's why it's complicated in 2025](#), by Michael L. Diamond, Asbury Park Press, Sept. 8, 2025

[NJ pharmacies delay COVID-19 vaccines after Trump administration confusion](#), by Brenda Flanagan, NJ Spotlight News, Sept. 4, 2025

About CCN

The [Center for Community News](#) at UVM is a nonpartisan nonprofit that is working to grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs around the country, to create a more sustainable future for local news outlets and the communities they serve.

Assignment: Covering vaccine changes in your community

At the national level, vaccines have become a contentious topic, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent years have seen changing public opinion around perceived vaccine safety as well as a decline in immunization rates for certain routine vaccines. In 2025, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy [purged](#) the Advisory Committee of Immunization Practices (ACIP) to “[restore] public trust.” He has also made several false claims around vaccines, including that the COVID-19 vaccine was the “deadliest ever made” and promoted debunked links between vaccines and autism. While some policies and guidelines are issued at the national level, vaccine requirements and public perception vary by state and community, making it an important topic to cover at the local level.

In this assignment, you will cover how changes in vaccine policy are having local impacts.

Instructions

Step 1: Start from a recent national story or state/municipal decision around vaccines. Think about how this might impact the local community. Do some background research around this particular policy change. Then, in your reporting group, split up tasks. Decide who will collect and analyze data, interview medical experts and local officials, and interview community members impacted by the changing policy.

Step 2: Report the story.

For data-gathering: It’s important to understand the vaccine landscape in your community. Seek out information from your state or local health department, through public databases and inquiries to public information officers. Stay up-to-date on state mandates/actions, data tracking, vaccine accessibility, and public announcements around vaccines and infectious diseases from your health department.

For interviews: Speak with health experts, medical providers, lawmakers, and other officials about this issue, and practice your man-on-the-street skills by interviewing residents as well. If you don’t understand something, ask your source to simplify it. They want you to understand!

Step 3: Compile and organize your research, transcribe your interviews, and write your story. Focus on the local impact of the national issue you started from. Write paragraphs from the information or interviews you gathered, then combine them with those of your team members. You can write this as a typical news story or turn it into an explainer piece.

People you can interview + resources:

- Medical providers: Hospitals, physicians, pharmacists, researchers
- Medical school researchers and professors at nearby universities/colleges
- State health department officials
- State health associations
- Local and state lawmakers, especially those who sit on health committees
- Places more at risk of disease outbreaks, like schools, day cares, and nursing homes
- Parents (especially regarding childhood vaccines like measles)
- Here are places you can find up-to-date federal information on vaccines:
 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [press room](#)
 - Vaccine Information Sheets from the [CDC](#)
 - Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices [page](#), where you can find meeting agendas, committee votes, recommendations, and more
 - The CDC tracks respiratory virus activity levels by state [here](#).
- [KFF](#) is a good resource for health policy coverage

Questions you can ask:

- For officials:
 - Is it harder to access this vaccine now than in the past? Why? Since when?
 - What is this state/municipality doing to ensure access to vaccines and provide accurate information to the public?
 - Are you seeing higher rates of this disease, compared to the last few years?
 - Is there concern around outbreaks in this community, or even this disease becoming endemic over the next several years?
 - Are you seeing more patients for infectious disease cases? Which ones? What do you attribute that to?
- For residents:
 - What is your reaction to this issue/policy change?
 - Are you getting vaccinated this year? Are you getting your kids vaccinated this year? Have you ever gotten vaccinated?
 - If you're interested in getting vaccinated, are you facing any challenges to accessing vaccines?
 - Did your views on vaccine requirements and vaccine safety change since the COVID-19 pandemic? Why or why not? What about your family and friends?

Definitions:

- **Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP):** A group of independent medical and public health experts who develop recommendations on the use of vaccines in the civilian population of the United States. The group includes up to 19 voting members who are chosen by the secretary of Health and Human Services.

- **Immunization:** the action of making a person or animal resistant to a particular infectious disease or pathogen, typically by vaccination (Oxford Languages)
- **Vaccine:** a substance used to stimulate immunity to a particular infectious disease or pathogen, typically prepared from an inactivated or weakened form of the causative agent or from its constituents or products (Oxford Languages)
 - See vaccine types [here](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
 - See diseases that vaccines help protect against [here](#)
 - Find the CDC Vaccine Glossary [here](#)
- **The Three 'demics:**
 - **Endemic:** (of a disease) regularly occurring within an area or community
 - **Epidemic:** a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time
 - **Pandemic:** a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease over a whole country or the world at a particular time

Word Count: _____

Deadline: _____