

Talking with Parents About Vaccine Safety



A few tips on how to start the discussion

Parents and patients are exposed to a wide range of viewpoints on vaccines and vaccine safety. More than ever before, they have questions—and often come in with concerns they've learned from friends, discussion groups, TV or on the Internet.

1. Take time to listen.

Don't rush to judge or dismiss them. Many parents want to participate in making an informed decision. Try to address their specific concerns. If necessary, suggest a special consultation appointment to give you extra time.

2. Validate their concerns.

It's a parent's top job to worry about their children. It's a provider's role to help them understand what to worry about regarding health and safety. Even parents who understand the value of immunizations may appreciate some reassurance.

3. Use a "heart and head" approach.

Statistics and scientific evidence do not resonate with everyone. You are more likely to reach parents at an emotional level by sharing personal anecdotes of patients with preventable diseases or stories from your family. Personal stories can be powerful motivators.

4. Balance risks and benefits.

Help parents understand that not vaccinating is far riskier than vaccinating. Personalizing vaccine preventable diseases as "real threats", not abstract concepts, or things of the past, can help parents appreciate that disease is more worrisome than possible reactions.

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5. Be flexible.

Work with your patients, not against them. Some parents or patients have already made up their minds and you are unlikely to influence those with strong opinions. If the parent requests a reduction or delay in the recommended schedule, you may wish to discuss the risks of waiting and/or use a declination form. But remember that parents have the legal right to opt out. Work with them to create a schedule that feels comfortable and allows the patient to get caught up over time. Reminder postcards and joining the [California Immunization Registry](#) (CAIR) can be great resources for your office and parents.

6. Direct them to reliable resources.

Research can be an empowering experience for parents. But the volume of information (and misinformation) can be daunting. By connecting parents with credible sources, you can help lessen confusion about conflicting messages they may read about vaccines. Offer them our [CIC Vaccine Safety 10 Facts for Parents](#) fact sheet or you can refer them to these trusted websites.

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.cispimmunize.org

Thimerosal FAQs

www.fda.gov/CBER/vaccine/thimerosal.htm

Evaluating Health Information on the Web

www.immunizationinfo.org/parents/evaluatingWeb.cfm

National Network for Immunization

www.immunizationinfo.org

Do Vaccines Cause That? (Book)

www.i4ph.org

Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases

www.pkids.org

The California Immunization Coalition (CIC) is a non-profit, public-private partnership dedicated to achieving and maintaining full immunization protection to promote health and prevent serious illness across the life span.



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