

How to Approach Conversations With Parents About Routine Pediatric Vaccinations

Vaccines are one of the best preventive health tools we have available to us today. That is why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends infants and young children follow a routine vaccination schedule to help protect them against infection and potentially serious illness. However, many parents still have a lot of questions when it comes time to get their children vaccinated.

Research shows that a physician's recommendation is oftentimes the single most important factor in parents' decisions to immunize their children. That is why it's so important that, as a physician, you come prepared and ready to address questions and provide the relevant resources to help families make informed health care decisions for their children and keep their children up to date on their vaccine appointments.

Check out a few helpful tips and conversation starters on CDC-recommended vaccines to use with parents during their child's well visits and annual checkups:

- **START THE CONVERSATION WITH A PRESUMPTIVE AND POSITIVE APPROACH**
 - When recommending vaccines for children, assume the parents are ready to accept the CDC-recommended vaccines. Rather than asking questions about their vaccination plan, explain which vaccines are needed for the child in that visit.

EXAMPLE:

Mrs. Smith, I see your child will receive the DTaP, Hib, and hepatitis B vaccines today.

- **GIVE A STRONG RECOMMENDATION**

- Parents are sometimes hesitant about immunizing their child. It is essential that clinicians be clear and confident when giving a strong recommendation. Describe the benefits of vaccination and explain that the vaccines are recommended by the CDC. Share personal experiences and stories along with scientific facts, as needed.

EXAMPLE:

Mrs. Smith, I strongly recommend your child get these vaccines today. ... These vaccines are very important to help protect your child from serious diseases.

- **LISTEN AND RESPOND TO QUESTIONS**

- If a parent is hesitant about getting their child vaccinated, listen and seek to understand the concerns behind the parent's questions. Be honest about side effects and reassure parents about the vaccine safety system. If you encounter questions and you do not have the answer, or if the parent gives you sources that are unfamiliar, it is best to acknowledge the parent's concerns and share what you do know. Offer to review the information they have found and, if necessary, schedule another appointment to discuss it further.

EXAMPLE:

Mrs. Smith, I hear your concerns and I'm here to answer your questions. I understand there is a lot of misinformation about vaccines circulating on the internet and on social media. I'm here to answer your questions and make sure you have accurate information when deciding to vaccinate your child.

• CONTINUED REFUSAL OF VACCINATIONS

- After you give a strong recommendation and have a conversation, if the parent continues to decline vaccinations, try these strategies to assist your practice:
 - Continue the conversation about vaccines during the next visit and restate your recommendation.
 - Remind the parent they need to notify health care facilities (e.g., clinics, emergency departments, hospitals) about their child's immunization status if their child becomes ill.
 - Share reliable resources from credible organizations with the parent.
 - Remind the parent that vaccines not only help protect their child, but other members of their community.
 - Document the parent's refusal in the child's medical record.

• CONTINUED CONVERSATION

- A parent's refusal of vaccinations at one appointment does not necessarily mean they will decline vaccines during the next office visit. Continue to have conversations with vaccine-hesitant parents and communicate transparently.
 - Work with parents to agree on at least one action:
 - Scheduling another vaccine appointment
 - Reading additional information that you have provided to them

Continue to remind parents about the importance of keeping their child up to date on CDC-recommended vaccinations during future visits, and work with them to get their child caught up if they fall behind.

STEPS TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE ABOUT ROUTINE VACCINATIONS FOR INFANTS AND CHILDREN

