

How to Communicate with Patients and Parents about Vaccination

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“The test of learning... is whether your understanding of situations you encounter has changed, not whether you have learned a new fact.”
- Daniel Kahneman

What’s vaccine hesitancy?

- Vaccine hesitancy: a reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite vaccine availability
- Vaccine hesitancy is a spectrum, not either/or (Leask et al., 2012)
 - Full acceptance without question
 - Acceptance but with some questions
 - Acceptance but with a lot of doubt
 - Limited acceptance (delayed schedules, accepting some but not all vaccines)
 - Complete refusal
- Not many are complete refusers - 1.5% of Canadian kids have never received a vaccine (Dubé et al., 2016) – but it’s still important to keep people from moving “down” the spectrum

What NOT to do...

- No studies have identified “the right way” to talk to parents who are hesitant, but there is some guidance on what *not* to do
- It’s not a knowledge gap problem; discussing “just the facts” can do more harm than good (Nyhan & Reifler, 2015; Nyhan, Reifler, Richey, & Freed, 2014)
 - Our minds like a good coherent story (Kahneman, 2011)
 - People come in with ideas about vaccination (experiences, conversations, internet searches, etc) – positive, negative, or in between
 - Those with in-between or negative ideas will be less receptive to advice to vaccinate as it contradicts what they already “know” – requires a lot of cognitive energy to reconcile the conflict
- Dismissing pts from your practice -> where are they going to go from there? (MacDonald, Desai, & Gerstein, 2018)
 - Tends to drive people towards the internet (where information is often dodgy) or towards alternative health care providers (highly inconsistent information)
 - Better that you keep the conversation going - there’s hope that they will change their minds, but if you dismiss them the conversation will be over

So... what SHOULD I do then?

- This is mostly consensus (MacDonald et al., 2018; McClure, Cataldi, & O'Leary, 2017)
- Remember that the parent is trying to do the best for their child and isn't (usually) burdened by concerns about what's best for society (Navin, 2015)
 - Think about what you're asking parent to allow us to do - there is reason to question!
 - Broader social context: "competitive parenting," lack of faith in institutions/government
- Trust is key - a trusted HCP's recommendation is very persuasive (MacDonald et al., 2018)
 - Best way to earn trust is to be trustworthy
 - Be honest about vaccine risks - don't hide but don't go overboard; provide perspective
 - Medical info is not a secret - in general, let patients "in on it" (pull back the curtain)
 - Validate that parent is concerned and has child's best interest at heart
- A presumptive approach is better for getting the vaccines done but may be less satisfactory to parents (Opel et al., 2015)
 - "So Jane is due to get her vaccines today" instead of "Are we going to do Jane's vaccines today?"
- Motivational interviewing
 - Inquire (open-ended) about specific concerns ("What have you heard?" or "What concerns you about vaccines?")
 - Affirm/reflect back to parent what you hear (lets them know they've been heard and not dismissed)
 - Correct misconceptions but don't go overboard - avoid "that's not true" statements, provide facts briefly and simply
 - Redirect discussion towards the benefits of preventing illnesses ASAP
 - "We've been seeing measles outbreaks – let's make sure your child is protected."
 - Consider discussing cases (your own or from Immunize Canada website – see references)
 - Don't bring up concerns that the parent doesn't already have! (e.g. if they don't express concern about mercury, leave it alone.)
- Do what you can to relieve pain during the shot (Taddio et al., 2015)
 - Do most painful shots last, skin-to-skin contact, breastfeeding/sweet solution (age 2 and under)
 - Don't aspirate, administer multiple injections simultaneously, Buzzy Bee device
 - If nothing else, at least do it quickly
- If they decline today, bring it up at the next visit ("So, have you thought further about the vaccines we discussed last time?") - stay supportive and respectful
- Do not miss an opportunity to get it done (e.g. if they're in for a non-vaccine-related visit)

Suggested online resources

For providers

- Canadian Immunization Guide
 - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/canadian-immunization-guide.html>
- Vaccine schedules: search by province
- Vaccine eligibility criteria: search by province
- Reporting Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI)
 - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/federal-provincial-territorial-contact-information-ae-fi-related-questions.html#man>

For patients/parents

- Immunize Canada (<https://immunize.ca>)
- Public Health Agency of Canada (<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization-vaccines.html>)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/index.html>)
- Vaccine fact sheets: search by province

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