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## Documenting Parental Refusal to Have Their Children Vaccinated

Despite our best efforts to educate parents about the effectiveness of vaccines and the realistic chances of vaccine-associated adverse events, some will decline to have their children vaccinated. Within a 12-month period, 85% of pediatricians report encountering a parent who refused or delayed one or more vaccines and 54% report encountering a parent who refused all vaccines. Even though scientific data solidly support the fact that vaccines are safe and effective, concern over harmful side effects, often taken out of context in the media and on unmonitored and biased Web sites, cause substantial and often unrealistic fears.

All parents and patients should be informed about the risks and benefits of preventive and therapeutic procedures, including vaccination. In the case of vaccination, federal law mandates this discussion. Despite doctors' and nurses' best efforts to explain the importance of vaccines and to address parental concerns about vaccine safety, some families will refuse vaccination for their children. Others will ultimately accept some or all vaccinations after repeated discussions during which the provider has listened to the parents concerns and addressed them in a non-condescending manner. The use of this or a similar form demonstrates the importance you place on appropriate immunizations, focuses the parents' attention on the unnecessary risk for which they are accepting responsibility, and may in some instances induce a wavering parent to accept your recommendations.

Providing parents (or guardians) with an opportunity to ask questions about their concerns regarding recommended childhood immunizations, attempting to understand the parent's reason for refusing one or more vaccines, and maintaining a supportive relationship with the family are all part of a good risk management strategy. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages documentation of the healthcare provider's discussion with a parent about the serious risks of what could happen to their unimmunized or under-immunized child. Provide the parents the appropriate Vaccine Information Statement (VIS) for each vaccine and answer their questions. For parents who refuse one or more recommended immunizations, document your conversation, the provision of the VIS(s), and have the parent sign the vaccine refusal form and keep the form in the patient's medical record. Revisit the immunization discussion at each subsequent appointment and carefully document the discussion, including the benefits to each immunization and the risk of not being age-appropriately immunized. For unimmunized or partially immunized children, some physicians may want to flag the chart to be reminded to revisit the immunization discussion, as well as to alert the provider about missed immunizations when considering the evaluation of future illness, especially young children with fever of unknown origin.

This form may be used as a template for such documentation but should not be considered a legal document and should not substitute for legal advice from a qualified attorney.

This form may be duplicated **or changed** to suit your needs and your patients' needs.

The Section on Infectious Diseases and other contributing sections and committees hope this form will be helpful to you as you deal with parents who refuse immunizations. It will be available on the AAP Web site ([www.aap.org/bookstore](http://www.aap.org/bookstore)), the Section on Infectious Diseases Web site (<http://www.aap.org/sections/infectdis/index.cfm>), and the Web site for the Academy's Childhood Immunization Support Program ([www.cispimmunize.org/](http://www.cispimmunize.org/)).

Sincerely,

/s/  
Meg Fisher, MD, FAAP  
Chairperson  
AAP Section on Infectious Diseases

/s/  
Ed Rothstein, MD, FAAP  
AAP Section on Infectious Diseases

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## Refusal to Vaccinate

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Child's ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My child's doctor/nurse, \_\_\_\_\_ has advised me that my child (named above) should receive the following vaccines:

### Recommended

- Hepatitis B vaccine
- Diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (DTaP or Tdap) vaccine
- Diphtheria tetanus (DT or Td) vaccine
- Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) vaccine
- Pneumococcal conjugate or polysaccharide vaccine
- Inactivated poliovirus (IPV) vaccine
- Measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine.
- Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine
- Influenza (flu) vaccine
- Meningococcal conjugate or polysaccharide vaccine
- Hepatitis A vaccine
- Rotavirus vaccine
- Human papillomavirus vaccine
- Other

### Declined

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I have read the Vaccine Information Statement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explaining the vaccine(s) and the disease(s) it prevents. I have had the opportunity to discuss this with my child's doctor or nurse, who has answered all of my questions regarding the recommended vaccine(s). I understand the following:

- The **purpose** of and the need for the recommended vaccine(s)
- The **risks and benefits** of the recommended vaccine(s)
- If my child does not receive the vaccine(s) according to the medically accepted schedule, **the consequences** may include:
  - Contracting the illness the vaccine should prevent (The outcomes of these illnesses may include one or more of the following: certain types of cancer, pneumonia, illness requiring hospitalization, death, brain damage, paralysis, meningitis, seizures, and deafness. Other severe and permanent effects from these vaccine-preventable diseases are possible as well)
  - Transmitting the disease to others
  - Requiring my child to stay out of child care or school during disease outbreaks
- My child's doctor or nurse, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention all strongly recommend that the vaccine(s) be given according to recommendations.

Nevertheless, I have decided at this time to decline or defer the vaccine(s) recommended for my child, as indicated above, by checking the appropriate box under the column titled "Declined."

I know that failure to follow the recommendations about vaccination may endanger the health or life of my child and others with which my child might come into contact.

I know that I may readdress this issue with my child's doctor or nurse at any time and that I may change my mind and accept vaccination for my child anytime in the future.

I acknowledge that I have read this document in its entirety and fully understand it.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I have had the opportunity to rediscuss my decision not to vaccinate my child and still decline the recommended immunizations.

Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Parental Refusal to Accept Vaccination: Resources for Pediatricians

The following are some of the resources available to help pediatricians develop a productive dialogue with vaccine-hesitant parents and answer questions about vaccine risks and benefits:

### Web sites

1. **AAP's Childhood Immunization Support Program (CISP)**  
Information for providers and parents.  
[www.cispimmunize.org](http://www.cispimmunize.org)
2. **The Immunization Education Program (IEP) of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics**  
Includes answers to common vaccine questions and topics, such as addressing vaccine safety concerns, evaluating anti-vaccine claims, sources of accurate immunization information on the Web; and talking with parents about vaccine safety.  
<http://www.paiep.org/>
3. **The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC)**  
The IAC works to increase immunization rates by creating and distributing educational materials for health professionals and the public that enhance the delivery of safe and effective immunization services. Their "Unprotected People Reports" are case reports, personal testimonies, and newspaper and journal articles about people who have suffered or died from vaccine-preventable diseases.  
<http://www.immunize.org/reports/>
4. **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Immunization Program**  
Information about vaccine safety, including Parents' Guide to Childhood Immunizations.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp.htm>
5. **National Network of Immunization Information (NNii)**  
Includes the NNii Resource Kit – Communicating with Patients about Immunizations. A guide to help answer patients' questions and provide the facts about immunizations.  
[www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)
6. **Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia**  
Information for parents includes Common Concerns About Vaccines, Are Vaccines Safe, and A Look at Each Vaccine.  
[www.vaccine.chop.edu](http://www.vaccine.chop.edu)
7. **Institute for Vaccine Safety, Johns Hopkins University**  
Provides an independent assessment of vaccines and vaccine safety to help guide decision-makers and educate physicians, the public, and the media about key issues surrounding the safety of vaccines.  
[www.vaccinesafety.edu](http://www.vaccinesafety.edu)
8. **The Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion (CCIAP)**  
CCIAP aims to meet the goal of eliminating vaccine-preventable disease through education, promotion, advocacy, and media relations. It includes resources for parents and providers, including "How to advise parents unsure about immunization" by Scott A. Halperin, MD.  
<http://immunize.cpha.ca/en/default.aspx>

### Journal Articles

1. Ball LK, Evans G, Bostrom A. Risky business: challenges in vaccine risk communication. *Pediatrics*. 1998;101:453-458. Available at: <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/101/3/453> (subscription needed)
2. Dias M, Marcuse EK. When parents resist immunizations. *Contemp Pediatr*. 2000;17:75-86
3. Offit PA, Jew RK. Addressing parents' concerns: do vaccines contain harmful preservatives, adjuvants, additives, or residuals? *Pediatrics*. 2003;112:1394-1397
4. Offit PA, Quarles J, Gerber MA, et al. Addressing parents' concerns: do multiple vaccines overwhelm or weaken the infant's immune system? *Pediatrics*. 2002;109:124-129
5. Diekema DS, and American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Bioethics. Responding to parental refusals of immunization of children. *Pediatrics*. 2005;115:1428-1431

### Books

1. Offit PA, Bell LM. *Vaccines: What Every Parent Should Know*. New York, NY: IDG Books; 1999
2. Humiston SG, Good C. *Vaccinating Your Child: Questions and Answers for the Concerned Parent*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers; 2000
3. Fisher MC. *Immunizations and Infectious Diseases: An Informed Parent's Guide*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2005
4. Marshall GS. *The Vaccine Handbook: A Practical Guide for Clinicians*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. West Islip, NY: Professional Communications, Inc.; 2008.
5. Myers, MG and Pineda D. *Do Vaccines Cause That? A Guide for Evaluating Vaccine Safety Concerns*. Immunizations for Public Health. 2008

## Reliable Immunization Resources for Parents

### Web sites

1. **AAP's Childhood Immunization Support Program (CISP)**  
Information for providers and parents.  
[www.cispimmunize.org](http://www.cispimmunize.org)
2. **Why Should I Immunize My Child?**  
A description of the individual diseases and the benefits expected from vaccination.  
[www.cispimmunize.org/fam/why.html](http://www.cispimmunize.org/fam/why.html)
3. **The Immunization Education Program (IEP) of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics**  
Includes answers to common vaccine questions and topics, such as addressing vaccine safety concerns; evaluating anti-vaccine claims; sources of accurate immunization information on the Web; and talking with parents about vaccine safety.  
<http://www.paiep.org/>
4. **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Immunization Program**  
Information about vaccine safety, including Parents' Guide to Childhood Immunizations  
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/parents.htm>
5. **National Network of Immunization Information (NNii)**  
Includes the NNii Resource Kit – Communicating with Patients about Immunizations. A guide to help answer patients' questions and provide the facts about immunizations.  
[www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)
6. **Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia**  
Information for parents includes Common Concerns About Vaccines, Are Vaccines Safe, and A Look at Each Vaccine.  
[www.vaccine.chop.edu](http://www.vaccine.chop.edu)
7. **Institute for Vaccine Safety, Johns Hopkins University**  
Provides an independent assessment of vaccines and vaccine safety to help guide decision makers and educate physicians, the public and the media about key issues surrounding the safety of vaccines.  
[www.vaccinesafety.edu](http://www.vaccinesafety.edu)
8. **The Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion (CCIAP)**  
CCIAP aims to meet the goal of eliminating vaccine-preventable disease through education, promotion, advocacy, and media relations. It includes resources for parents and providers, including "How to advise parents unsure about immunization" by Scott A. Halperin, MD.  
<http://immunize.cpha.ca/en/default.aspx>
9. **Vaccinate Your Baby**  
The Every Child by Two site serves as a central resource of vaccine information for parents. The site links to the latest research and studies about vaccines, an interactive timeline on the benefits of vaccines, information about vaccine safety and ingredients and the importance of adhering to the recommended schedule.  
[www.vaccinateyourbaby.org](http://www.vaccinateyourbaby.org)

### Books:

1. Offit PA, Bell LM. *Vaccines: What Every Parent Should Know*. New York, NY: IDG Books; 1999
2. Humiston SG, Good C. *Vaccinating Your Child: Questions and Answers for the Concerned Parent*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers; 2000
3. Fisher MC. *Immunizations and Infectious Diseases: An Informed Parent's Guide*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2005
4. Myers, MG and Pineda D. *Do Vaccines Cause That? A Guide for Evaluating Vaccine Safety Concerns*. Immunizations for Public Health. 2008

# Reliable Sources of Immunization Information: Where to go to find answers!

## Websites

### American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

[www.aap.org/immunization](http://www.aap.org/immunization) AAP's childhood immunization website contains information for both parents and clinicians.

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines) The information on this website ranges from official vaccine recommendations for healthcare professionals to information for the general public about vaccines.

### Every Child by Two (ECBT) [www.ecbt.org](http://www.ecbt.org) and

[www.vaccinateyourbaby.org](http://www.vaccinateyourbaby.org) ECBT, founded by Rosalynn Carter and Betty Bumpers, has created these two websites. Each contains a broad array of educational materials and information about vaccines, their safety, vaccine research and science, vaccine misperceptions, and many other topics to help clinicians and parents.

### Immunization Action Coalition (IAC)

[www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org) and [www.vaccineinformation.org](http://www.vaccineinformation.org) IAC is a nonprofit organization that promotes immunization for all people against vaccine-preventable diseases. These websites offer educational materials, photos, and video clips for parents, healthcare professionals, the media, and the general public.

### National Network for Immunization Information (NNii) [www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)

NNii provides current, science-based, extensively reviewed information to healthcare professionals, the media, policy makers, and the public.

### U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services (HHS)

[www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov) Vaccines.gov is the federal gateway to information on vaccines and immunizations for infants, children, teenagers, adults, and seniors.

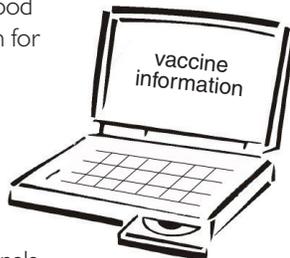
### Vaccine Education Center (VEC) [www.vaccine.chop.edu](http://www.vaccine.chop.edu)

The goal of the VEC at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia is to accurately communicate the facts about each childhood vaccine. VEC publishes a monthly vaccine e-newsletter for parents titled "Parents PACK." For more information or to subscribe, visit [www.vaccine.chop.edu/parents](http://www.vaccine.chop.edu/parents)

## Phone Numbers

### CDC-INFO Contact Center

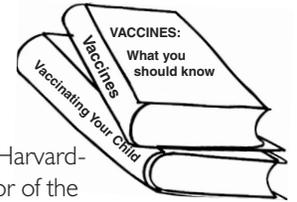
A toll-free number for consumers and healthcare professionals who have questions about immunization and vaccine-preventable diseases. Call (800) CDC-INFO or (800) 232-4636. The Center operates 24/7 in English & Spanish. TTY: (888) 232-6348.



## Books for Parents

### Baby 411, 4th edition

By Denise Fields and Ari Brown, MD, Windsor Peak Press, 2009. Written by a Harvard-trained pediatrician (Brown) and the author of the best-selling *Baby Bargains* (Fields), this book is the ultimate compilation of frequently asked questions for baby's first year. It includes a special section on vaccines. To purchase, visit your local bookstore or [www.windsorpeak.com/baby411](http://www.windsorpeak.com/baby411)



### Do Vaccines Cause That?! A Guide for Evaluating Vaccine Safety, 1st edition

By Martin Myers, MD, and Diego Pineda, MS. Published by Immunizations for Public Health, 2008. Get straight, science-based answers to parents' questions about the safety of vaccines. To purchase, visit your local bookstore or [www.dovaccinescausethat.com](http://www.dovaccinescausethat.com)

### Parents Guide to Childhood Immunization, 2010

This 68-page booklet from CDC introduces parents to 14 childhood diseases and the 10 vaccines that can protect children from them. Parents can order a free booklet or print their own copy by visiting [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/parents-guide](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/parents-guide)

### Plain Talk About Childhood Immunization, 6th edition

Washington State Department of Health, et al., 2008. This 54-page booklet provides parents with accurate information about immunizations and the diseases they prevent, vaccine safety, and other topics of interest to the public. The publication, available in English and Spanish, can be downloaded at <http://here.doh.wa.gov/materials/plain-talk-about-childhood-immunizations> in either low resolution (for printing on office copiers) or high resolution (for professional printing).

### Vaccines and Your Child, Separating Fact from Fiction, 2011

By Paul Offit, MD, and Charlotte Moser, Columbia University Press, 2011. This book answers questions about the science and safety of modern vaccines. In straightforward prose, Offit and Moser explain how vaccines work, how they are made, and how they are tested. Most important, they separate the real risks of vaccines from feared but unfounded risks. To purchase, visit your local bookstore or [www.cup.columbia.edu](http://www.cup.columbia.edu)

## Videos

### "Vaccines and Your Baby" and "Vaccines: Separating Fact from Fear"

Available for a nominal charge in English and Spanish in DVD format, these videos answer many questions that new parents have. Ordering information is available at [www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/familyOrder.cfm](http://www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/familyOrder.cfm) or parents can watch the videos online at [www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/related-information/multimedia.html](http://www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/related-information/multimedia.html).





## Vaccine Safety: The Facts

**Why vaccinate?** Vaccines save lives and protect against the spread of disease. If you decide not to immunize your child, you put your child at risk. Your child could catch a disease that is dangerous or deadly. Getting vaccinated is much better than getting the disease.

Your pediatrician knows that you care about your child's health and safety. That's why you need to get all the scientific facts from a medical professional you can trust before making any decisions based on stories you may have seen or heard on TV, the Internet, or from other parents. Your pediatrician cares about your child too and wants you to know that...

- **Vaccines work.** They have kept children healthy and have saved millions of lives for more than 50 years. Most childhood vaccines are 90% to 99% effective in preventing disease. And if a vaccinated child does get the disease, the symptoms are usually less serious than in a child who hasn't been vaccinated. There may be mild side effects, like swelling where the shot was given, but they do not last long. And it is rare for side effects to be serious.
- **Vaccines are safe.** All vaccines must be tested by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA will not let a vaccine be given unless it has been proven to be safe and to work well in children. The data get reviewed again by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians before a vaccine is officially recommended to be given to children. Also, the FDA monitors where and how vaccines are made. The places where vaccines are made must be licensed. They are regularly inspected and each vaccine lot is safety-tested.
- **Vaccines are necessary.** Your pediatrician believes that your children should receive all recommended childhood vaccines. In the United States vaccines have protected children and continue to protect children from many diseases. However, in many parts of the world many vaccine-preventable diseases are still common. Since diseases may be brought into the United States by Americans who travel abroad or from people visiting areas with current disease outbreaks it's important that your children are vaccinated.

Also, children with certain health problems may not be able to get some vaccines or may need to get them later. Since each child is different, your child's doctor will know what is best for your child. You should get information about each vaccine at the doctor's office. Ask your child's doctor if you don't understand what you've read.



## Vaccine Safety: The Facts

- **Vaccines are studied.** To make sure the vaccine continues to be safe, the FDA and the CDC created the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). All doctors must report serious side effects of vaccines to VAERS so they can be studied. Parents can also file reports with VAERS. For more information about VAERS, visit [www.vaers.hhs.gov](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov) or call the toll-free VAERS information line at 800/822-7967.

Based on VAERS reports, vaccine safety professionals continuously look for any problem with a vaccine, study the problem, and decide what to do. And if there is a problem, changes are made as soon as possible.

For example,

- If a vaccine is no longer safe, it is no longer given.
- If there are new side effects, safety alerts are sent out to your health care providers.

Another way the CDC checks vaccine safety is by studying information about side effects collected from 8 large insurance companies. The Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD) helps identify if there are any serious problems or safety issues from the records of thousands of children.

In the rare case that a child has serious side effects to a vaccine, parents can contact the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) at 800/338-2382 or [www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation](http://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation). This federal program was created to help pay for the care of people who have been harmed.

### Resources

#### American Academy of Pediatrics

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)  
[www.cispimmunize.org](http://www.cispimmunize.org)

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

#### Food and Drug Administration

[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

#### National Network for Immunization Information

[www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)

### From your doctor

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to ask your pediatrician.

Please note: Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this publication. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.