State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Public Health

Talking with Parents about Vaccines

Strategies for Community Health Workers

Immunizations are necessary to help keep our communities healthy and safe and from diseases.

Parents are sometimes concerned about vaccines. Because you have a trusted relationship with the communities you serve, you are uniquely qualified to support parents in understanding the value of immunizations.

Communications strategies are essential to relieve parental concerns, dispel myths about vaccines, and keep communities protected from vaccine-preventable disease.

What You May Hear From Parents

Why should I take my child for shots?

You don't hear about many cases of measles or whooping cough any more.

Sample Response

We don't see as many cases of those diseases as we used to, but they are still around and these diseases can make your child very sick. And if your child does get sick because she didn't get her shots, doctor bills can be expensive and you could lose money if you have to be off from work. Further, your children will miss classroom time because they are not allowed to attend school unless they have gotten their vaccines.

Vaccines cause autism.

Sample Response

Of course we understand that your child's health is your top priority. There has never been a link shown between vaccines and autism – in fact, all documents that have made that claim have been disproven. Vaccines are safe, but the diseases that vaccines prevent can cause serious complications and sometimes death – they are still a threat and vaccination is your best chance to stay healthy.

Sample Response

Multiple medical professionals came together to design a schedule that will provide protection as early as possible. They have studied this for a long time and there isn't any evidence that your otherwise healthy child's immune system will be damaged by getting more than one vaccine at a time. Your baby, even as a newborn, can handle many shots at once.

There are too many shots, too close together.

Why does my baby get the same vaccine more than once?

Sample Response

All childhood vaccines are given in two or more doses. Your baby needs more than one dose because each one builds on the last one to develop your baby's immunity. Immunity is her body's protection from disease. A second or third dose is needed to fully protect her. These doses work best if they're given on schedule.

Vaccines cause side effects.

Sample Response

Most babies don't have side effects from vaccines. In the rare instance that they do, side effects usually aren't serious. Some vaccines may cause low fever, a rash, or soreness at the spot where the shot was given. These reactions are signs that the immune system is working like it's supposed to and learning to fight off infections.

There is a U.S. Vaccine Safety System and their job is to monitor for possible side effects, even after a vaccine is licensed. The U.S. has the safest vaccine supply in history.

We don't trust the health care system.

Sample Response

That is understandable. But the same list of vaccines and the schedule for getting them is required for all children in this country. There is no difference in the vaccines you receive and those of children from other communities.

How To Have A Successful Dialogue

- Take time to listen – don't be judgmental and keep the focus on the family
- Solicit and welcome questions
- Keep the conversation going
- Share an anecdote or personal story if you are comfortable (e.g., unprotected child who became ill,)
- Acknowledge benefits and risks
- Respect parents' authority

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