Communicating With Vaccine-Hesitant Parents
Approaches & considerations ...

John Dunn, MD MPH
Medical Director for Preventive Care
Kaiser Permanente Washington
Communicating With Hesitant Parents

Goals for today ...
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Defining the challenge
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Terms used on purpose ...

Refusal
Hesitancy
Acceptance
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**WHAT it is (and isn’t)**

“Parents with attitudes or beliefs that lead them to question the value of immunizations for their children”

*Definition DOES NOT necessarily include “refusal of vaccination”*
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Concerns of vaccine hesitant parents ...

- Number of shots
- Number of diseases
- Ingredients
- Actual adverse effects
- Perceived Adverse effects
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Upshot ...

A “vaccine hesitant parent” may ...

• Decline or delay some vaccines
• Refuse all vaccines
• Vaccinate their children on-schedule despite their concerns.
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Spectrum of vaccine hesitancy

"resistant" < --------- "hesitant" --------> < --------- "not hesitant" -------->
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**WHO it is (and isn’t)**

In the past...
- Above-average income & education

Some patterns:
- Low healthcare utilization
- Homeschooling

However ... these associations are limited!
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**WHY it happens**

- Inaccurate information
- Misperceptions of risk
- Changing social & cultural dynamics
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Inaccurate information ...

“Vaccines are unsafe”

“Vaccines are unnecessary”
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Inaccurate information ...

Correct the knowledge deficit!
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Inaccurate information ...

Knowledge base

Vaccine practice
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Inaccurate information ...

FACTS

have limited impact
The decision to delay or omit vaccinations is often based on something other than (or in addition to) pure statistical "facts"
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Misperceptions of risk ...

Past experience

A “sin-of-omission” versus a “sin-of-commission”

Cognitive biases
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Changing social & cultural dynamics ...

Individual lifestyle choices

Impact on health care relationships and dynamics
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Changing social & cultural dynamics ...

Access to information (and misinformation)
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Changing social & cultural dynamics ...

Access to information (and misinformation)

The internet

Social media
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Changing social & cultural dynamics ...

The internet

Access to information
(and misinformation)

Social media
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Impact on actual behavior Doesn't improve with use of the traditional "knowledge deficit model"

Partly due to misinformation

So now that I know that, what do I do???
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- Facts and science
- Parental rights
- Clinical goals
- Patient advocate
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EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

Studies of interventions directed at PARENTS...
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EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

So – what DO we know ... ?
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Effective interventions ...

... probably relate less to the CONTENT of the message than to the way it is DELIVERED
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**Effective interventions ...**

... probably relate less to the CONTENT of the message than to the way it is DELIVERED
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**Effective interventions ...**

- Keep it routine
- Keep it comfortable
- Assess the situation & tailor your approach

*Face-to-face ...*

... require some element of trust-building & motivational technique

... also require a strong recommendation for vaccination from the provider
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Effective interventions ...

Face-to-face ...

- Make it routine
- Keep it comfortable
- Assess the situation & tailor your approach
- Remember ...

“The art of persuasion involves getting a person to arrive on their own at the conclusion you want them to reach”
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Effective interventions ...

Make it routine

Default is vaccination!
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Effective interventions ...

Make it routine

Provider recommendation is key ...

Provider recommendation is key ...
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Effective interventions ...

Make it routine

... but everyone needs to be involved!
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Effective interventions ...

Make it routine

Presumptive Recommendation
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Effective interventions ...

Make it routine

Take the initiative!
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Effective interventions ...

Make it routine

Don’t drop the subject!
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Effective interventions ...

Keep it comfortable
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Effective interventions ...

Keep it comfortable

Collaborative Approach!
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Effective interventions ...

Keep it comfortable

Know your limitations!
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Effective interventions ...

Keep it comfortable

Resist the urge ... to argue about facts
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Effective interventions ...

Keep it comfortable

Resist the urge ...

to frighten or threaten
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**Effective interventions ...**

- Keep it comfortable
- Resist the urge ... to ridicule or shame
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Effective interventions ...

Not all hesitancy is created equal

Tailor your approach
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Spectrum of vaccine hesitancy

Refuse all  Refuse some or delay  Vaccinate on schedule

“resistant” < -------- “hesitant” --------> < -------- “not hesitant” -------->
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Spectrum of vaccine hesitancy

- Have QUESTIONS, not necessarily mistrustful of vaccines
- Often DO respond to facts ... so have them ready!
Vaccines can cause mild side effects that usually appear within a couple days. The most common are fever or soreness where the injection was given.

Serious side effects from vaccines are extremely rare. For example, one child in a million may get a severe allergic reaction to the DTaP vaccine.

There is no evidence that vaccines are linked to chronic diseases such as autism, autoimmune disease, asthma, or diabetes.

The benefits of vaccines far outweigh the risks.
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“Isn’t this too many shots at one visit?”

- There is no evidence that getting more than one vaccine at the same time will harm your child. Newborn babies successfully respond to many more new substances every day than are in the vaccines we recommend. The human immune system can recognize and respond to thousands of organisms in the body at the same time. This is true even for newborn babies.

- Your choice to stick to the recommended vaccine schedule actually makes your child’s immune system stronger.
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“The vaccines we offer to young babies are for diseases that are especially dangerous to them. These diseases can have devastating long-term effects on your baby’s health.

It is actually more dangerous to delay vaccines than to give them. This is because the diseases that vaccines prevent are more severe than any side effects. Most of the time, young babies are exposed to these diseases from people around them every day, such as brothers, sisters, parents, and other family members and caregivers.

“Why does my child need all these vaccines at such a young age? Is it safer to delay some shots?”
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“Will my child be exposed to toxins from these vaccines?”

- No. Vaccines do contain some additives. Vaccines today contain fewer additives than the ones you may have had as a child. But some additives are necessary.
- Aluminum is present in some vaccines to improve immune response. However, healthy babies quickly eliminate aluminum from their bodies. In fact, babies get more aluminum from breast milk or formula in their first six months of life than they do from vaccines.
- The influenza vaccine—or “flu shot”—is the only childhood vaccine that contains the mercury-based preservative thimerosal. But our best evidence clearly shows that thimerosal in vaccines does not cause autism or other harmful effects. The form of mercury known to be dangerous to health has never been in any vaccines.
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“Can I use an alternative schedule?”

- The evidence suggests that there is no benefit to delaying vaccines. In fact, it actually places your child at risk for getting a disease that vaccines could otherwise prevent.

- There is flexibility within the recommended schedule. Let’s look over it together and come up with a plan that you’re comfortable with.
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Spectrum of vaccine hesitancy

Refuse all  Refuse some or delay  Vaccinate on schedule

“resistant” < --------- “hesitant” --------> < -------- “not hesitant” -------->
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Spectrum of vaccine hesitancy

- Refuses everything, despite multiple attempts to discuss & persuade
- Unlikely that you will convince them to change ... so focus efforts elsewhere
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**Spectrum of vaccine hesitancy**

- Delaying and/or refusing
- Can be persuaded, but requires an investment of careful effort
Effective interventions ...

The art of persuasion

Getting a person to arrive on their own at the conclusion you want them to reach
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Effective interventions ...

The art of persuasion

Environment where vaccination is the social norm: routine & assumed
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Effective interventions ...

The art of persuasion

Comfortable, open conversation
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Effective interventions ...

Alignment: self-image as a good parent with vaccination

The art of persuasion
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Effective interventions ...

The art of persuasion

Alignment of parent agenda with your own
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**Effecte interventions ...**

The art of persuasion

Structure the discussion on your terms ... with the default-in-mind
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**Effective interventions ...**

**The art of persuasion**

*If the default option is vaccination ... Then refusal requires an active request*
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Population-level interventions ...
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Population-level interventions ...
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Discussion & questions