

Helping Parents Understand Myths About Childhood Immunization

Pediatricians of Ontario (Pediatrics Section, Ontario Medical Association) recognize that some parents have concerns about vaccines. That's why the Pediatricians Alliance of Ontario asked more than 130 pediatricians what parents were asking them about vaccinations. Here are some common myths and key messages that you can use to dispel them.

MYTH #1: Vaccines can cause disorders such as autism.

The Facts: Vaccines help to build your child's immune system so it can resist harmful diseases. Because children are vaccinated at around the same age as autism is often diagnosed, some people think vaccinations and autism are linked ... but they're not! Vaccines do not cause autism.

What does this mean for me and my family? Here's what pediatricians say :

- Autism is a complex neurological disorder. Many studies – involving millions of children – have found no connection between vaccination and autism.
- Many people continue to mistakenly believe that there is a link between vaccines – in particular the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine – and autism based on a discredited study that was conducted by Dr. Andrew Wakefield and published in *The Lancet* in 1998. This paper was later retracted by the journal. In 2010, the General Medical Council in the United Kingdom removed Dr. Wakefield from the physician register and he is no longer licensed as a physician in the UK.

MYTH #2: A few of the materials used in vaccines are unsafe.

The Facts: In Canada, we have very strict guidelines for making vaccines. Safety tests are carried out by the Biologics and Genetic Therapies Directorate of Health Canada. Certain materials – such as thimerosal, formaldehyde and aluminum – are used to kill bacteria and make vaccines as safe and effective as possible.

What does this mean for me and my family? Here's what pediatricians say :

- The minimal amounts of thimerosal (a mercury-based preservative), formaldehyde and aluminum contained in vaccines are necessary for their safety and effectiveness. These materials occur naturally in the environment, and the amounts contained in vaccines are much lower than your children are exposed to on a day-to-day basis.
- Many studies – conducted with millions of patients – have shown the safety of vaccines.
- Millions of vaccines are given every day! This is the best evidence we have that vaccines are safe and effective.

MYTH #3: Multiple injections will overwhelm my baby's immune system.

The Facts: Vaccines are designed to protect your baby as soon as possible against more than one disease. Rather than overwhelming your baby's immune system, vaccines make the immune system stronger. Babies do not experience more side effects when more than one vaccine is given at a time.

What does this mean for me and my family? Here's what pediatricians say :

- The immune system is very powerful, and normally fights off millions of germs on a daily basis.



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MYTH #4: “Natural” immunity is better than vaccine immunity.

The Facts: Natural infection from certain diseases can kill or seriously harm your child before his/her body is able to develop a strong immune system. Vaccines use harmless or inactive virus or bacteria to trigger the body's natural immune response to provide long-term protection against a disease, without the risk of getting the disease. Vaccination is like a rehearsal for the immune system, so it is prepared if your child is exposed to the “real” disease.

What does this mean for me and my family?

Here's what pediatricians say:

- Vaccines are the best way to protect children, and the diseases that we choose to vaccinate against are those where we know that the risk of disease for your child is greater than the risk of the vaccine.
- Measles, for example, continues to be one of the leading causes of death in children globally, even though a safe and cost-effective vaccine is available.

MYTH #5: Vaccine-preventable diseases don't exist in Canada anymore, so there is no need for my child to be immunized.

The Facts: We are lucky! Our immunization programs have reduced the number of cases of and deaths resulting from many serious diseases in Canada. Even if the chances of contracting them in Canada are quite small, these diseases still exist in other parts of the world and can infect anyone who is not protected. Vaccination continues to provide the best protection against these diseases.

What does this mean for me and my family?

Here's what pediatricians say:

- People in Canada travel a lot! We travel, for business and pleasure, to places where vaccine-preventable diseases still exist. We, and other travellers, can bring these illnesses back with us and infect people who are not vaccinated. That's why it's important for your child – and all children – to be vaccinated!

MYTH #6: Many people who are immunized still get the disease, which proves that vaccines don't work.

The Facts: Sometimes a person does not develop immunity to the disease after being vaccinated. However, it is important to note that the vaccine does not cause the disease. As well, if a person who is vaccinated develops the disease, it will be less severe.

What does this mean for me and my family?

Here's what pediatricians say :

- Vaccines are not 100 per cent effective. However, if a child who has been vaccinated gets the disease, the illness will be much less severe and the risk of complications is lowered.
- The bottom line is that vaccines work, and they save lives! We are lucky to have a national vaccine strategy and such sound research and oversight to support the safety and effectiveness of vaccination programs.

MYTH #7: A healthy lifestyle and breastfeeding are enough to protect me and my child.

The Facts: A healthy lifestyle is important to help maintain your overall good health. Breastfeeding gives babies a great start but it will not protect your child against all of the specific diseases that can be prevented with vaccination.

What does this mean for me and my family?

Here's what pediatricians say :

- Breastfeeding reduces ear infections, diarrhea and respiratory infections, and pediatricians support it. However, breastfeeding is not enough to protect your child from serious diseases that can be prevented by vaccines.
- Although children are protected by your immunity for the first six months of life, after that they have to make their own protective immunity – vaccines help babies build their natural defense against diseases.

Conclusions

Vaccines are safe and effective, and immunization programs in Canada help protect you and your family from vaccine-preventable diseases. It is very important that you talk to your health care provider about any concerns regarding vaccines. Healthcare providers are passionate about protecting children and will take the time to discuss your concerns and share their knowledge about how vaccines work to build your child's immune system! A healthy immune system is the key to wellness.

This information can be found on www.pcchu.ca go to **For Professionals** | **Health Professionals** under **Resources**.

Countries Affected by MERS-CoV

On March 4, 2015, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) website updated the list of countries affected by the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV) to reflect those countries with local transmission of the virus. These countries are all located in the Middle East and include: Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. As this list of affected countries is subject to change, please review this site regularly for the latest information. Health sector employers and healthcare workers may contact the Ministry's Health Care Provider Hotline at emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca or at 1-866-212-2272 with questions about MERS-CoV.

Does your patient require a medical exemption from immunization?

With the changes to the *Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA)*, healthcare providers need to complete a medical exemption form for students. Exemptions due to medical contraindication can be provided for any reason determined by the healthcare provider, and can either be permanent or limited to a specified period of time. The exemptions apply for vaccines related to the following diseases:

- Diphtheria
- Pertussis
- Meningococcal Disease
- Mumps
- Varicella
- Tetanus
- Poliomyelitis
- Measles
- Rubella

The forms are available on Ontario Government's on-line forms repository at www.forms.ssb.gov.on.ca and under search, enter 'medical exemption'. The form must be completed by a physician or nurse practitioner. The form can be faxed to the Health Unit 705-743-2897.

NOTES:

1. Evidence of immunity against measles, mumps, or rubella requires laboratory confirmation of immunity or infection for each disease.
2. Evidence of immunity against varicella (chickenpox) requires either:
 - diagnosis or verification of a history of varicella or herpes zoster infection by a healthcare provider; or
 - laboratory confirmation of immunity or infection.

If you have any questions, please call 705-743-1000 and ask to speak to a Public Health Nurse

Babies First

Babies First is a prenatal nutrition and support program for women to join in their first or second trimester of pregnancy.

Babies First is supported by a Public Health Nutritionist, Nurse, Addictions Counselor, Lactation Consultant and Registered Early Childhood Educators and is intended to offer specialized support to women facing challenging life circumstances while pregnant.

This program is focused on helping women achieve healthy births and provides pregnant women with food skill development, supplemental food, and vitamin vouchers. Through participation in this FREE program, women can prepare for labour, birth and transition to parenthood in a highly supportive environment.

Located at the Peterborough Family Resource Centre this program operates from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Fridays.

Referral Forms are available at www.pfrc.ca go to [Programs | Prenatal | Babies First](#) and can also be made by women by calling 705-748-9144.

Report of an Adverse Event Following Immunization

The form to report and adverse event following immunization can be found on www.pcchu.ca go to [For Professionals | Health Professionals | Vaccines](#) or the Public Health Ontario website. Please fax the completed form to the Health Unit at 705-743-2897.

If you have any questions, please call a Vaccine Preventable Disease Nurse at 705-743-1000

Events For HCPs

Public Health Ontario (PHO) Grand Rounds - Webinar

Tuberculosis: Non-adherence to Treatment and Infection Control, Why it's a Problem, and What to do About it

Tuesday, March 31, 2015

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Tuberculosis (TB) is a severe airborne illness, curable with extended treatment. Most patients just want to get better—but sometimes non-adherence to medication or infection control puts others at risk.

This session will cover:

- evaluating the public health risk for relapse, transmission, and drug resistance
- identifying individual and systems barriers
- strategies to support treatment completion, including legal action (section 22 and 35 orders).

Presenter: Dr. Elizabeth Rea

Dr. Elizabeth Rea has been the associate medical officer of health with the TB program at Toronto Public Health since 2005. She is an author of the Canadian TB Standards, active in provincial and national TB policy, and the current chair of Stop TB Canada.

Public Health Ontario Grand Rounds are approved for continuing medical education from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons.

PHO Grand Rounds are also approved by Council of Professional Experience for professional development hours (PDHs) for members of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (CIPHI).

For more information, contact ian.johnson@oahpp.ca.

For PHO learning opportunities go to www.publichealthontario.ca | **Learning and Development**

More ways to stay informed!

Protect yourself with the right health information.

Follow PCCHU on Twitter at www.twitter.com/PCCHU, see us on Facebook at www.facebook.ca/PCCHU1.



Resources For Patients

Visit www.pcchu.ca for information on:

Spring Rabies Clinics go to [Clinics & Classes | Clinics | Rabies Clinics](#). The Health Unit, in co-operation with the local veterinarians, is sponsoring low-cost rabies clinics in our area for dogs and cats over the age of three months.

Fluoride go to [My Life & Health | Parents & Caregivers | Fluoride in Drinking Water](#) and found under [Resources](#). Resources include: Fluoridated Water & Infants, Top 10 Facts about Fluoride, Fluoride Facts for Parents, and more.

Health Events For Patients

DO YOU WANT TO QUIT SMOKING CIGARETTES?

The **STOP program** delivers research-based, cost-free smoking cessation workshops in local communities.

Eligible participants will:

- Attend an **educational session**
- Receive a five-week course of **nicotine patches**

Workshop(s) will be held on

March 24, April 28, and May 13, 2015

in

Peterborough

To learn more, see if you qualify, and to register, contact:

Peterborough County-City
Health Unit at
705-743-1000

*Confidentiality assured.



View the **FYI Newsletter** online at www.pcchu.ca under For Professionals | Health Professionals | FYI Newsletter