

Vaccine hesitancy

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Highlights

- The most common concerns expressed by parents were the risk of autism (64%), too many vaccines (62%), the risk of a weakened immune system as a result of vaccination (52%), and vaccine additives (51%).

Background

Despite the documented success of vaccines in decreasing the incidence of vaccine-preventable illness, the rate of vaccine compliance in Canada falls below national targets. Research suggests that primary care providers play a central role in vaccine decision-making as they are viewed by parents as the most trusted source for vaccine safety information. There is limited evidence regarding effective strategies for addressing vaccine hesitancy and little is known about how vaccine hesitancy impacts paediatric practice in Canada.

Results

A one-time survey through the CPSP was conducted to understand how paediatricians respond to parents with concerns about vaccination and the impact of vaccine hesitancy on practice. The survey was distributed to 2521 paediatricians and paediatric subspecialists. The response rate was 27% (n=669) which is consistent with other CPSP one-time surveys. Fifty-seven percent of respondents were general paediatricians and 43% were subspecialists.

The results indicate that the majority of paediatricians (89%) encounter parents with concerns about vaccination. Forty percent of respondents indicated that the frequency of vaccine-hesitant parents has increased compared to five years ago. The most common concerns expressed by parents about vaccination include the risk of autism (64%), too many vaccines (62%), the risk of a weakened immune system as a result of vaccination (52%), and vaccine additives (51%). Thirty percent of paediatricians noted that at least half of children whose parents expressed concerns about vaccination never received the recommended vaccines.

When initiating discussions about vaccination, 55% of respondents used a presumptive (“We have to do some shots.”) as opposed to a participatory approach (“What do you want to do about shots?”). In response to parent resistance, paediatricians most commonly discussed the risks of non-vaccination (93%), restated their vaccine recommendations (69%), or referred to reliable patient resources (62%). More than half (52%) of paediatricians noted that discussions with vaccine-hesitant parents were generally positive and nearly two thirds (64%) indicated that discussions typically lasted less than ten minutes.

The most common challenges in working with parents who expressed concerns about vaccination were frustration with parent resistance (69%) and time (66%). Nearly half (45%) of respondents indicated that vaccine hesitancy impacts their practice; most commonly by increasing the length of clinic visits (63%), leaving less time to discuss other issues (50%), or causing tension with the parent (50%). Four percent of respondents indicated that patients that received none of the recommended vaccines would not be permitted to continue to be served by the practice.

Conclusion

- A one-time CPSP survey revealed that 89% of respondents have encountered parents who expressed concerns about childhood vaccines in the last 12 months.
- Nearly half of respondents indicated that vaccine hesitancy impacts their practice, most often by increasing the length of clinic visits, leaving less time to discuss other issues, or causing tension with the parent.

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