

Resources for addressing patient/parent concerns about immunisation

Introduction

Over the past decade there has been increasing interest in vaccine safety. The success of vaccines has resulted in a remarkable reduction in morbidity and mortality from many infectious diseases. However, in the absence of these diseases, some members of the community have become concerned regarding the potential side effects associated with immunisation. In addition, the introduction of new vaccines in recent years has meant more questions related to the number of immunisations given, and how the immune system responds. We are often asked by vaccine service providers and other health professionals for information on how to discuss questions from patient/parents who have concerns about immunisation. These enquiries have been collated and reviewed, with many of them relating to similar concerns.

Some of the questions asked by patients/parents include:

- “Can too many vaccines overload or suppress the immune system?”
- “Why do some children get the disease despite being vaccinated?”
- “Isn’t natural immunity better than immunity from vaccination?”
- “Is homeopathic immunisation a suitable alternative?”
- “I understand that vaccines contain additives. Can these be harmful?”
- “Weren’t diseases disappearing long before vaccines were introduced?”
- “Can vaccines cause long term effects such as autism, multiple sclerosis and diabetes?”

Resources to answer these questions

There are a variety of resources available to answer patient/parent questions about immunisation, with many of these accessible using the internet. The links to these resources are provided below (accessed December 2009). Some of these are Australian, while others are from countries such as the United States and the United

Kingdom that also contain valuable information relevant to the Australian setting.

Immunisation Myths and Realities: Responding to arguments against immunisation. 4th edition. 2008.

Produced by Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

Available in pdf format from

<http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/uci-myths-guideprov>

The Australian Immunisation Handbook. 9th edition. 2008.

Appendix 5 Commonly asked questions about vaccination
Produced by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation and endorsed by the National Health and Medical Research Council

Available in pdf format from

<http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbook-home>

Common concerns about vaccines

Chapter 15 from the book *Vaccines: What you should know*, 3rd edition, by Paul A. Offit and Louis M. Bell. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons; 2003: p.92-115.

Chapter 15 is also available in pdf format from the Immunization Action Coalition website at

<http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4038.pdf>

Some common misconceptions about vaccination and how to respond to them

Produced by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Immunization Program.

Available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/gen/6mishome.htm>

Vaccine safety: addressing common concerns

Produced by the CDC. Provides links to frequently asked questions about vaccine safety.

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/concerns/>

Vaccine safety issues of interest

Produced by CDC National Immunization Program

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/>

Vaccine safety FAQs

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Vaccine Education Center:

<http://www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/vaccine-safety/>

Immunisation frequently asked questions

Produced by the United Kingdom Department of Health

<http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk/FAQs>

Vaccination questions and concerns

Chapter 20 of the *New Zealand Immunisation Handbook* 2006

Produced by the New Zealand Ministry of Health

<http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/immunisation-handbook-2006>

NCIRS have also produced fact sheets that deal with some of these issues in more detail.

Please visit the website at <http://ncirs.edu.au/immunisation/fact-sheets/index.php>