



Objective

To identify common causes of parental anxiety regarding childhood vaccinations and seek suggestions for parents to overcome their anxiety.

Background

- Parents do not always return on-time for vaccinations as scheduled
- Parents' willingness to immunize children in a timely manner can be affected by emotions/distress exhibited by crying/anxiety of their children
- Identifying specific triggers of parental anxiety regarding childhood vaccinations may promote more timely return

Demographics

Parents

- Sample size: 36
- 88% Female
- 53% ages 26-35, 35% ages 36-55
- 97% married
- 35% had only 1 child

Children

- Mean number of children in household: 2.18
- 85% aged 2-5 years
- Mean age: 5.73 years

Method

- Informed consent obtained from parents
- Recruitment with flyers and newspaper ads
- 4 one-hour focus groups conducted
- Parents questioned about causes of vaccine-related anxiety
- \$25 incentive provided for participation



Photo from: <http://afteramerica.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/child-doesnt-like-shots3.jpg>

Qualitative Results

Six themes (three common causes of anxiety and three recommendations) were identified from the focus groups:

Common Causes of Anxiety

1. Parental Anxiety Prior to Immunization

- Guilt of “doing the right thing” when immunization may have risks and side effects
- Perceived mixed messages from health care providers or media
 - Parents believed that childrens' immune system not fully developed until older
 - Parents believed that harm would occur from content of vaccination

“I was anxious about giving an immunization and about not giving an immunization, so no matter what, [I] will have that anxiety.”

2. Parental Anxiety During Immunization

- Obligated to be present to comfort child but traumatized when child was restrained
- Concerned over number of shots administered at the same visit
- Reported that child gender/personality influences parent's experience

“I was holding his hands and he was looking at me with that big smile and as soon as the doctor you know put the needle in his leg, I could see his face just transforming. And for me that was a feeling of betrayal for myself to my son.”

3. Parental Anxiety After Immunization

- Parents worried about physical side effects (i.e. fever and site tenderness), especially those listed on the Vaccine Information Sheets (VIS)
- Parents reported there were interruptions to daily routine with “sick” child for days following immunization

“My anxieties don't so much rest with like the actual needle or the shot, but more with what the shot will do.”

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

- Manage/set-up follow-up appointment quickly
- Don't require parents to restrain child
- Don't rush office visit, allow time to answer questions

“[W]hat really helped me is that [my doctor] was willing to just sit there and spend 25 minutes and just talk to me.”

2. Information Issues

- Take time to explain terminology
- Autism is still a major concern of parents, even though they recognize scientific information discounts a correlation between autism and immunizations
- Recommend credible sources of information
- Parents want to know why immunization dosing is not adjusted on child's weight
- Consider shortening Vaccine Information Sheet (VIS), including a website where parent can go later for more in-depth information
- VIS with too much information for some parents and not enough for other parents

“I mean they give you two sided sheets every time for every single shot – you read all the risks and it's just like, ‘I'm not a nurse.’”

3. Other Miscellaneous Points

- “Newer” immunizations (HPV or H1N1) invoke more worry than established immunizations
- Most parents rely on healthcare provider for advice

“[My doctor said] ‘you know I would give them to my children’ and he said ‘I've done a lot of research. I wouldn't just do anything... but I have confidence in doing it.’”

Implications for Practice

Strategies to Help Parents Overcome Anxiety

- “Shots Made Easy”
- Credible websites:
 - www.cispimmunize.org
 - www.vaccineinformation.org
 - www.immunizationinfo.org
 - www.vaccine.chop.edu