



Objectives

To identify common personal/philosophical beliefs of why parents in Utah exempt children from receiving vaccinations.

Background

- Childhood immunizations play a crucial role in reducing the spread of communicable diseases in the U.S.
- An increasing number of parents file for philosophical exemption.
- National trends for this type of philosophical exemption include: concerns about safety and side effects, decreased perceived susceptibility to and severity of vaccine preventable diseases, and antigovernment sentiment.
- The increasing number of philosophical exemptions puts populations at risk for contracting diseases.

Methods

- Tool included 16-item questionnaire (fill in the blank, multiple choice, open-ended comment sections).
- Tool was sent to and distributed by Utah Health Departments.
- Qualitative data came from the following question: "Please share any other comments you feel would be helpful to understand why you are claiming a personal or philosophical exemption."
- Themes and categories were identified.

Demographics

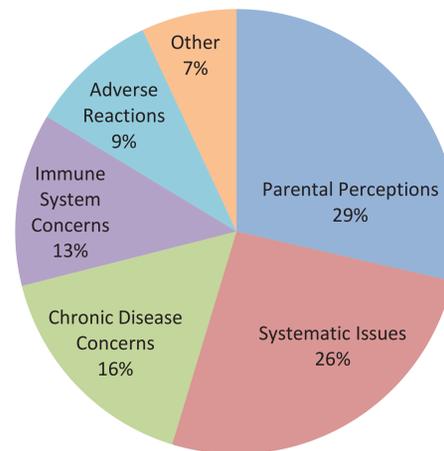
Inclusion criteria included parents requesting philosophical exemption from local health department. (n = 287)

- Female 85.8% (n = 241)
- Male 14.2% (n = 40)
- Age: 20 to 47 years, median age 35 years (SD = 7.9)
- Education:
 - College graduate: 42.6% (n = 115)
 - Some college: 38.9% (n = 105)
 - High school or less: 11.5% (n = 50)
- Annual household income: >\$45,000 (62.9%; n = 168)
- Race:
 - White: 94.7% (n = 252)
 - American Indian/Asian/
Native Hawaiian: 2.7% (n = 8)
 - Other: 2.3% (n = 6)

Qualitative Results

Six categories were identified regarding reasons for philosophical exemptions:

Reasons Parents Choose Philosophical Immunization Exemption for Their Children



1. Parental Perceptions

- 28.6% exempted as a result of negative perceptions regarding vaccines. Most of these parents were concerned about safety and concerned about affirming their parental rights.

"Risk outweighs benefits. Pharmaceutical [companies] are in control. I want the choice. I want control. Most diseases are curable now."

2. System Issues

- 26.1% experienced difficulties with the immunization process. Almost half of these parents had lost records or records were unavailable, while the other half either completed the wrong exemption form (needed medical or religious exemption) or stated they needed more time.

"Don't have all immunization records together but I want my child in school."

3. Chronic Disease Concerns

- 16.4% expressed concern that vaccinations cause chronic disease in children. Over half of these parents believe that autism may be linked to immunizations.

"My daughter is autistic. It is believed to be caused from immunizations."

4. Immune System Concerns

- 12.5% fear immunizations overwhelm their child's immune system.

"No one will give her vaccines in the way I feel is safe, which is one disease at a time and no more than one vaccination a month."

5. Adverse Reactions

- 9.3% fear adverse reactions, with the majority citing reactions that occurred to family members and friends.

"Overall I think [immunizations are] good, but my son had terrible reactions from them."

Conclusions

- System issues contributed to over 25% of personal belief exemptions in Utah, with the highest factor being lost or unavailable immunization records.
- Majority of Utah parents filing for exemption have concerns regarding vaccination safety and potential adverse side effects.
- Most effective interventions for maintaining national childhood immunization rates may be (1) addressing system issues along with (2) educating parents about the nature, function, and safety of vaccinations.