

Media Release

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A right to refuse? Poll finds unvaccinated kids being refused care by health care providers

New research released today reveals a worrying pattern of practice in Australian health care in which some unvaccinated children are being refused care by health care providers.

The latest [Australian Child Health Poll](#) has found that one in six Australian children who are not up-to-date with their vaccines have been refused care by a health care provider.

Director of the Child Health Poll, paediatrician Dr Anthea Rhodes said that while in the United States a clinician's right to refuse care to an unvaccinated child has been a topic for some time, this poll suggests a worrying pattern of practice not previously identified in Australia.

"All children, regardless of their vaccination status, have an equal right to health care," Dr Rhodes said.

This poll also found that a clear majority of Australian parents indicate support for strong policies to help get kids up-to-date on vaccines and preserve immunity in the community.

"While some medical professionals will argue that unvaccinated children can present a risk to other patients, we must remember that children aren't making these choices about vaccination for themselves. By turning them away, health care providers not only deny health care to a child, but remove the possibility of educating parents and helping them to eventually choose to vaccinate," Dr Rhodes added.

Among children whose parents reported them as not being up-to-date with their vaccines, children under six were most likely to be refused care by a health care provider (25 per cent), followed by 21 per cent of primary school-aged children and five per cent of teenagers.

This poll also found:

- The vast majority of Australian parents support childhood vaccination and keep their children's vaccines up-to-date.
- 74 per cent of parents believe they should be informed about the number of children not up-to-date with vaccines in their child's school, kindergarten or child care centre.
- Seven out of ten parents said that knowing the percentage of under-vaccinated children in a school or centre would influence their decision to send their child to that facility.

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- Nearly three quarters of parents across Australia support a 'No Jab, No Play' policy, believing children who are not up-to-date with vaccines should be refused access to child care or kindergarten.
- Many Australian parents are confused about whether to delay vaccines when a child has a minor illness with nearly half (47 per cent) incorrectly saying vaccination should be delayed in a well child on antibiotics, and one in five (22 per cent) in a child who has had a local reaction to a previous vaccine, such as swelling or redness.
- Despite extensive medical research showing no causal link, one in ten Australian parents believe that vaccines can cause autism, and a further 30 per cent are unsure.

Dr Rhodes said the poll served as an important reminder that while most parents follow the National Immunisation Program for their children, the level of vaccine-related concern and misconceptions among parents is significant.

"While the vast majority of parents vaccinate their children, we found that almost a third of Australian parents have some concerns about vaccination.

"All vaccines currently available in Australia must pass stringent testing before being approved for use by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), and yet one in ten parents said they were unsure whether vaccines were safe for their children, and one in six believe they contain ingredients that can cause serious harm such as mercury. Since the year 2000, vaccines available on the National Immunisation Program have not contained the mercury-containing preservative thiomersal," Dr Rhodes added.

She said ongoing education and communication to tackle parents' concerns is vital to ensure high levels of vaccination among families.

"We also know that the majority of parents have poor knowledge about when vaccines may need to be delayed, so this poll highlights the need to encourage them to see their health care provider for advice before assuming their child can't be vaccinated when they've got a runny nose or are on antibiotics," Dr Rhodes said.

For more information, including media material, see www.childhealthpoll.org.au

Data Source

The sixth Australian Child Health Poll is a survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,945 adults aged 18 years and older. Collectively respondents had a total of 3,492 children. The survey is conducted by an independent research agency on behalf of The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. Each sample is subsequently weighted to reflect the latest Australian population figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.

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