

Our Vaccine Policy Statement

We firmly believe in the effectiveness of vaccines to prevent serious illness and to save lives. We firmly believe in the safety of our vaccines.

We firmly believe that all children and young adults should receive all of the recommended vaccines according to the schedule published by the *Centers for Disease Control* and the *American Academy of Pediatrics*.

We firmly believe, based on all available literature, evidence and current studies, that vaccines do not cause autism or other developmental disabilities. We firmly believe that thimerosal, a preservative that has been in vaccines for decades and remains in some flu vaccines (which we no longer use), does not cause autism or other developmental disabilities.

We firmly believe that vaccinating children and young adults may be the single most important health-promoting intervention we perform as health care providers, and that you can perform as parents/caregivers. The recommended vaccines and their schedule given are the results of years and years of scientific study and data gathering on millions of children by thousands of our brightest scientists and physicians.

These things being said, we recognize that there has always been and will likely always be controversy surrounding vaccination. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin, persuaded by his brother, was opposed to smallpox vaccine until scientific data convinced him otherwise. Tragically, he had delayed inoculating his favorite son Franky, who contracted smallpox and died at the age of 4, leaving Ben with a lifetime of guilt and remorse. Quoting Mr. Franklin's autobiography:

In 1736, I lost one of my sons, a fine boy of four years old, by the smallpox...I long regretted bitterly, and still regret that I had not given it to him by inoculation. This I mention for the sake of parents who omit that operation, on the supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a child died under it, my example showing that the regret may be the same either way, and that, therefore, the safer should be chosen.

The vaccine campaign is truly a victim of its own success. It is precisely because vaccines are so effective at preventing illness that we are even discussing whether or not they should be given. Because of vaccines, many of you have never seen a child with polio, tetanus, whooping cough, bacterial meningitis or even chickenpox, or known a friend or family member whose child died of one of these diseases. Such success can make us complacent or even lazy about vaccinating. But such an attitude, if it becomes widespread, can only lead to tragic results.

Over the past several years, many people in Europe have chosen not to vaccinate their children with the MMR vaccine after publication of an unfounded suspicion (later retracted) that the vaccine caused autism. As a result of under-immunization, there have been small outbreaks of measles and several deaths from complications of measles in Europe over the past several years.

The 2008 measles outbreak in Pima County occurred when an unimmunized Swiss traveler showed up at Tucson's Northwest Hospital and infected other people there.

Since that time, several cases of measles occurred in Tucson, almost all in unimmunized or inadequately immunized people. This included a two-year-old child who ended up in the hospital in a coma with measles encephalitis.

In addition to the health costs of a measles outbreak, the financial cost to the Pima County Health Department in containing Tucson's measles outbreak was \$800,000. This cost will be paid by Pima County and Arizona taxpayers. The \$800,000 does not include the cost of testing and immunizing employees at every hospital, police department, fire department, and others in Tucson.

A 2012 investigation by the *Arizona Daily Star* found that vaccination rates were as low as 50 percent in Pima County charter and private schools, who were not abiding by state law. This low rate often affects the most vulnerable in a community, such as a Phoenix baby, too young to be immunized, who died of whooping cough. Older kids who are not vaccinated can bring home diseases to their younger, more vulnerable siblings.

As the Star explains, “the more people in a group who are vaccinated, the better protection for the weaker among them”:

High vaccination rates help prevent the vulnerable from being exposed to infectious diseases. Infants too young to be immunized face the biggest risk from an unvaccinated population because their small bodies can easily succumb to an aggressive bacterial disease like pertussis, also known as whooping cough. High vaccination rates also protect people with conditions such as Down syndrome, whose weakened immune systems make them vulnerable despite vaccinations. Finally, high rates protect those whose vaccinations did not work, which for a disease like pertussis can be as high as 20 percent.

"It's a very real risk, choosing not to vaccinate," said Natalie Norton, whose newborn son died of pertussis in January 2010. "It's like playing Russian roulette with your own children, and with everybody else's."

..."You are vaccinating your kids so that you protect your community. It's a community responsibility - it's a social contract," said Will Humble, director of the Arizona Department of Health Services.

We believe that vaccinating your kids is a community and social responsibility. Those who chose to not vaccinate their children still benefit from those who do, because a higher vaccination rate (over 80 percent) decreases the likelihood that their child will contract one of these diseases. It also puts our patients at risk if an unimmunized child has a vaccine-preventable illness and is in our waiting room.

We are making you aware of these facts not to scare you or coerce you, but to emphasize the importance of vaccinating your child. We recognize that the choice may be a very emotional one for some parents, but we strongly believe that vaccinating according to the schedule is the right thing to do. Please be advised that delaying or “breaking up the vaccines” to give one or two at a time over two or more visits goes against medical expert recommendations, and can put your child at risk for serious illness (or even death) and goes against our medical advice as providers. Such additional visits will require additional co-pays on your part. Furthermore, you will be required to sign a “Refusal to Vaccinate” acknowledgement in the event of lengthy delays.

Please recognize that by not vaccinating you are putting your child and others at unnecessary risk for life-threatening illness and disability, and even death. As medical professionals, we feel very strongly that vaccinating children on schedule with currently available vaccines is absolutely the right thing to do for all children and young adults. Thank you for your time in reading this policy, and please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about vaccines with any one of us.

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2014

* The above policy is based on the All Star Pediatrics policy statement, which was reprinted in the American Academy of Pediatrics News in May 2008.

Recommending Reading:

Paul Offit, M.D. *Vaccines and your Child*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/?s_cid=cdc_homepage_topmenu_002

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia-Vaccine Information Center
<http://www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/home.html>

Immunization Action Center
<http://www.immunize.org/>

Infectious Diseases Society of America. "Measles Outbreak Underscores Need for Continued Vigilance in Health Care Settings." *Science Daily*. April 29, 2011.
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110429095102.htm>

O'Dell, Rob and Stephanie Innes. "Star Special Report: Kids skipping shots increases threat of dangerous outbreak." *Arizona Daily Star*. May 20, 2012.
http://azstarnet.com/news/science/health-med-fit/kids-skipping-shots-increases-threat-of-dangerous-outbreak/article_a9d00658-3365-5ba6-9cd8-0ea5e70d8d2b.html