

Study: US parents increasingly ask doctors to delay vaccines

March 2 2015, byLindsey Tanner



In this Jan. 29, 2015 file photo, a pediatrician uses a syringe to vaccinate a 1-year-old with the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine in Northridge, Calif. A national survey of doctors in 2012 suggests that parents have increasingly pressured doctors to delay vaccines for young children, making their kids and others vulnerable to preventable diseases. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

U.S. parents have increasingly pressured doctors to delay vaccines for young children, making their kids and others vulnerable to preventable

diseases, a study suggests.

The findings are in a national survey of pediatricians and family [doctors](#) asked about parents wanting to postpone some of the many shots recommended for [children](#) younger than age 2. Nearly all doctors said that at least some parents had requested [vaccine](#) delays in a typical month; and 1 in 4 said those numbers had increased since the previous year.

More about the survey in Monday's Pediatrics and delaying [childhood vaccines](#):

THE STUDY

The researchers surveyed 534 doctors by email or regular mail in 2012. Participants were doctors who are members of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians—the two leading groups of doctors who treat [young children](#). One in 5 doctors said at least 10 percent of parents had requested vaccine delays by spreading them out over more months than is recommended.

Most doctors said the practice puts kids at risk for getting vaccine-preventable diseases and might lead to disease outbreaks, but most also said they at least sometimes agreed to the delays. Only 3 percent said they often or always tell parents who insist on vaccine delays to seek care from another doctor.

THE CONCERNS

The potential repercussions are worrisome and are happening "right now with the measles outbreak," said Dr. Allison Kempe, a University of Colorado researcher and a member of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's vaccine advisory committee. Kempe is the

study's lead author. More than 150 people in several states have been infected with measles, including infants too young to be vaccinated. Most cases are tied to an outbreak at Disneyland in California, which likely began with a traveler who brought it in, as has been the case in other U.S. outbreaks. The exact source of the Disneyland-linked cases is not known.

Doctors are concerned about unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children becoming ill and spreading disease to others.

VACCINE RECOMMENDATIONS

Vaccinations against 14 diseases are recommended for children younger than 2, starting at birth and given every few months. Some shots combine vaccines against more than one disease; the measles shot also protects against mumps and German measles. Even so, young children may get five shots at once under the recommended [vaccine schedule](#).

Some parents want to delay shots by spacing them out, partly to spare their kids from getting jabbed so many times at one sitting. Doctors surveyed said other reasons include worries about possible long-term complications and other risks from vaccines, which medical experts say are unfounded. The study didn't ask doctors which vaccines parents asked to delay.

The recommended vaccine schedules are based on research on timing shots to be most effective at preventing disease. Delaying shots meant to be given at a certain age means they may be less effective. It also makes it more likely that children will never get vaccinated, because [parents](#) get too busy or forget to schedule another doctor's visit, said Dr. Robert Frenck, an infectious diseases specialist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. He was not involved in the new study.

"People just don't understand that these diseases are all there, they're not gone. They're just being kept at bay right now. If people stop vaccinating, they come right back," Frenck said.

More information: CDC vaccine schedule: tinyurl.com/cxvfm82

American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org

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Citation: Study: US parents increasingly ask doctors to delay vaccines (2015, March 2) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-parents-increasingly-doctors-vaccines.html>

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