

Rejecting Vitamin K at birth predicts child vaccination refusal

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New Zealand parents who turn down vitamin K for their newborns are more than 14 times more likely to not get their children immunised, a new University of Otago study has found.

The Department of Women's and Children's Health researchers suggest that this newly revealed link pinpoints a small, but easily identifiable, group of families to whom targeted early education about the benefits of immunisation could be offered.

Their findings are published in the international *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*.

Vitamin K in [newborns](#) is given to prevent vitamin K deficiency, which can in rare instances lead to severe bleeding and death. It is usually administered by [intramuscular injection](#), but can also be given orally.

The researchers' study of the medical records of 3,575 babies born in Dunedin in 2010 and 2011 found that of those 3% of parents who declined vitamin K for their babies, 17% went on to turn down all early childhood immunisations. These immunisations are scheduled for 6 weeks, 3 months, 5 months and 15 months.

In comparison, of those who consented for vitamin K to be given, only 1.2% declined subsequent immunisation.

Five per cent of children whose parents opted for oral vitamin K (4.8%

of the study group) did not have any subsequent vaccinations. These parents were also more likely to be late for immunisations at 6 weeks of age, a lack of timeliness that puts infants at greater risk of catching diseases such as whooping cough.

Additionally, children whose parents declined vitamin K were more than five times as likely to have completed only some of their vaccinations.

Study lead author Dr Ben Wheeler says the findings strongly suggest that parental decision-making around vitamin K is a good predictor of wider choices about having a child immunised or not.

"From a public health perspective, this is an important insight. It highlights how pregnancy and the newborn period is a critical time for education and support to promote public health initiatives. Maintaining high immunisation rates in New Zealand is vital to ensure our children do not fall prey to sometimes deadly infectious diseases that we thought we'd left behind," Dr Wheeler says.

Targeted education and support for parents who decline Vitamin K injections could potentially be offered at an early stage to better inform their choices and hopefully improve [immunisation](#) coverage, he says.

Provided by University of Otago

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