

New research into how peace of mind can influence parents' attitude to vaccines

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Many people experience peace of mind from getting their children vaccinated, according to new research from the University of Bristol. However, this benefit is currently being ignored when health bodies weigh up vaccine benefits to make decisions about whether or not to introduce vaccines or expand their coverage.

The qualitative study, published in *Vaccine*, found that peace of mind should be considered in the health economic framework used by decision makers, but that more research is required to further define and quantify peace of mind.

Many different factors are considered by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), who advise UK government on vaccines, but peace of mind is not currently one of them.

Researchers found that whether a person experienced peace of mind from vaccination depended on their knowledge of the benefits of having a jab. The reassurance they experienced was from knowing that when an individual was vaccinated it would offer some level of protection against a disease.

While peace of mind from vaccinating their children was important to some participants of the study, it wasn't for others. Parents who benefitted tended to think that vaccination was intrinsically beneficial, but people who simply considered vaccination as a routine health intervention said that they did not receive peace of mind benefits.

Even though these peace of mind benefits are only experienced by some parents, the added value to their health could still influence decisions on whether or not a government should fund a [vaccine](#). The research suggests [decision makers](#) need to consider these benefits.

The researchers also found that peace of mind varies over time. Reassurance from the knowledge of benefits, or from [healthcare providers](#), could be diminished by short-term unease about believing a child could be in pain or distress when receiving a jab. Certain vaccines brought less peace of mind if an individual either hadn't experienced the disease or if they had experienced of a mild form of the disease as a child but without complications.

Discussion from one focus group reported the longer a vaccine had been introduced, the more safe it felt to them. Participants were more cautious about vaccinations that they considered to be 'newer' or vaccinations that they had little personal experience with. There were exceptions to this for severe illnesses such as meningitis. The MenB vaccine, although considered relatively 'new' by some participants, provided increased reassurance because of the perceived severity of the disease.

Dr. Gemma Lasseter, lead author, Research Fellow and Programme Manager at the National Institute for Health Research Health Protection Research Unit in Evaluation of Interventions at the University of Bristol, said: "Our research, funded by the Meningitis Research Foundation, shows that vaccine associated peace of mind was important to some members of the UK general public when making vaccination decisions for themselves or their children. This peace of mind varied in magnitude, duration and over time. These findings are important because they indicate that the current economic approach used to make funding decisions about healthcare interventions in the UK may need to be refined to take peace of mind into consideration in the future."

Dr. Hannah Christensen, co-author and Senior Lecturer at the University of Bristol, said: "When policy makers decide which health interventions are made available free at the point of use in the NHS they consider the benefits and costs, to assess whether the intervention provides value for money. This research shows us there is a benefit, in terms of peace of [mind](#) after vaccination, that could contribute to these policy decisions. Given the benefit appeared quite variable between people, and was influenced by a person's attitudes and beliefs about vaccinations, the challenge now is to work out how we can appropriately capture the 'value' of this [peace of mind](#) benefit so that it can contribute meaningfully to the vaccine decision-making process."

Vinny Smith, Chief Executive at Meningitis Research Foundation, the charity that funded the research, said: "This study now highlights that current government vaccine decisions miss some important benefits of immunisation. When considering the introduction of new vaccines, we want the government to take into account important health benefits, such as the reassurance that comes from knowing that your child is protected from death and disability."

"Parents know how dangerous and concerning meningitis is, and consistently rate it as a more serious illness than other preventable diseases. When the MenB vaccine was first introduced in September 2015 it was provided to young babies, but [older children](#) were not eligible for the vaccine on the analysis at the time of cost against benefits. Subsequently, the tragic death of a two year old from MenB in 2016, led to a surge in demand for the vaccine and an online petition calling for wider access. We have been calling for government to address the unfairness of the vaccine rules, which, if addressed, may have made the vaccine accessible to all children under the age of five."

"This study also gives us an insight into beliefs about vaccines can change. More time for conversations between healthcare professionals and parents could help address incorrect beliefs about vaccines and increase knowledge of the benefits."

More information: G. Lasseter et al, Understanding the role of peace of mind in childhood vaccination: A qualitative study with members of the general public, *Vaccine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2019.12.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2019.12.009)

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