

Almost 1 in 5 parents are 'vaccine hesitant,' study finds

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(HealthDay)—Nearly one in five American parents described

themselves as "hesitant about childhood shots" in 2019, a new U.S. government study finds.

That was fewer than the one in four who expressed hesitancy about vaccines in 2018.

The new research found real consequences from [vaccine hesitancy](#). Rates of flu vaccination were 26 percentage points lower in children of "vaccine-hesitant" [parents](#) in both years studied.

"This is a very large percentage point difference," said study leader Tammy Santibanez, an epidemiologist with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, in Atlanta.

Vaccine hesitancy has contributed to large outbreaks of preventable diseases in several countries, including the United States, the study authors said.

"Reducing vaccine hesitancy and increasing confidence in vaccinations could help improve vaccination coverage and thus protect children from disease," Santibanez said. She suggested parents talk with their [health care provider](#) about the benefits of vaccination for individuals and communities.

The need for that conversation is urgent: A lack of trust could have significant consequences if a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available and a large percentage of parents don't vaccinate their kids.

Findings from the study were published online Nov. 9 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

The researchers defined vaccine hesitancy as the "mental state of holding

back in doubt or indecision regarding vaccination."

In the spring of 2018, the researchers surveyed more than 36,000 U.S. parents about vaccine hesitancy. They repeated the survey with almost 40,000 parents in spring of 2019.

The parents were asked whether their kids get vaccinated according to the standard schedule and whether they hesitate to vaccinate. They were also asked about concerns regarding the number of vaccines a child gets at one time and whether their child's doctor is their most trusted source of vaccine information.

The study found:

- In 2018, 7.5% of parents were very hesitant and 18% were somewhat hesitant about vaccines.
- In 2019, almost 6% of parents said they were very hesitant and nearly 14% were somewhat hesitant about vaccines.
- Just 6% of parents said they used a nonstandard schedule for their child's vaccines.
- Almost 23% of parents in 2018 and 19% in 2019 said they were concerned about the number of vaccines a child gets at one time.
- About 27% of parents in 2018 and 22% in 2019 expressed concern about long-term side effects.
- Fewer than 15% of parents said they personally knew someone who had a long-term problem related to a vaccine.
- More than eight out of 10 parents said their child's doctor was their most trusted source of information on vaccines.

Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, reviewed the study findings.

Offit said while it's good to see a decline in vaccine hesitancy, it's important to see if this difference is sustained for more than one year.

Asked about vaccine-hesitant parents possibly skipping flu vaccines for their children, Offit said, "Flu is hard—it's a yearly vaccine, and because the flu mutates every year, it's not as effective a vaccine—it's only around 50% effective."

But the vaccine is most effective in kids. And, he said, it's important to remember that flu sends hundreds of thousands of people to the hospital every year and kills tens of thousands.

Dr. Michael Grosso, chief medical officer and chairman of pediatrics at Northwell Health's Huntington Hospital in New York, said lack of confidence rather than lack of access appears to be "the major driver of under-immunization in the U.S." He said pediatricians encounter it almost daily.

Grosso cited several contributing factors.

"One is lack of familiarity with vaccine-preventable conditions like measles and whooping cough. In this regard, it has been said that the international [vaccine](#) program is the victim of its own success," he explained.

Other factors include opposition to public health mandates in general, feeling as if the decision is one parents should make, and for some, an anti-science sentiment.

"Needless to say, these issues are exacerbated by [social media](#) that amplify the worries of like-minded parents, making it hard for many to discern what is real and what is myth," Grosso said.

More information: Learn more about how vaccines work from the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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