

Anxiety about vaccine safety is driving parents to seek information from other sources

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Expectant parents are encountering misinformation about children's vaccinations on social media and in small inner circles because they feel

inadequately informed by some healthcare professionals who lack sensitivity, according to new research.

Pregnancy should be an ideal time to provide education on both pregnancy and [childhood vaccinations](#) but a new study at Flinders University looking at the reasons behind jab refusals has highlighted the immediate need to provide more information and improved education on vaccinations.

Published in the *International Journal of Nursing Studies Advances*, a review of thirty-one existing papers from high to [middle income countries](#) from around the world, including Australia, determined concerns about [vaccine safety](#) cause considerable anxiety amongst expectant parents with fears of adverse reactions and long-term side effects.

Measles has resurfaced recently in Australia largely due to pockets of low immunization uptake. Despite the potential of death associated with Measles, it's often considered by parents to be a minor childhood illness, according to the authors.

Lead author of the study, Susan Smith from the College of Nursing & Health Sciences, says poor healthcare relationships can result in [vaccine](#) refusal because of safety and other concerns.

"In Australia for example, childhood immunization uptake is high recently, achieving over 95% coverage for [five-year-old children](#), but there is significant uptake shortfall in some communities, as well as in the uptake of antenatal immunisations. This shortfall in immunization uptake suggests varying degrees of vaccine hesitancy," says Mrs Smith.

"The research indicates multiple factors influence decisions to accept or reject vaccines based on perceived safety concerns including false

reports of autism links in the case of measles concerningly persist despite significant evidence to debunk this theory.

Importantly, some [healthcare professionals](#) report feeling inadequately prepared for the role of immunization promotion and provision so we can safely assume they feel further training and support is needed."

The review also reveals that education and support in vaccine decision making is best provided during pregnancy for expectant mums, and midwives are best placed to deliver information, but many feel underprepared for this role.

"There is no doubt that educating and informing parents is a complex task so improved healthcare provider education, and a consistent approach may help in addressing this.

Australia has adopted a consistent approach by refusing to accept non-medical exemptions to vaccination, however, this is not the case in other countries. Eighteen states in the U.S. still allow non-medical reasons for exemption, including religious and philosophical reasons for vaccine exemptions which don't help build confidence.

The research also shows the desire for a more natural lifestyle, often described as salutogenic parenting, has been associated with hesitancy around vaccination.

"Parents have reported using a focus on health and wellbeing parenting as a means of supporting the wellbeing of children and this is an area where healthcare professionals are well placed to address concerns and correct misinformation."

More information: Susan E. Smith et al, Decision making in vaccine hesitant parents and pregnant women – An integrative review,

International Journal of Nursing Studies Advances (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijnsa.2022.100062](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnsa.2022.100062)

Provided by Flinders University

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