

Children's Medical Group of Saginaw Bay Vaccine Policy Statement

Adopted 1 December 2011

We firmly believe in the effectiveness of vaccines to prevent serious illnesses and to save lives.

We firmly believe in the safety of our vaccines.

We firmly believe that all children, adolescents and adults should receive all of the recommended vaccines according to the schedule published by the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

We firmly believe, based on all available evidence obtained via scientifically rigorous studies, that vaccines do not cause autism or other developmental disabilities or any other disease.

We firmly believe that vaccinating children, adolescents and adults may be the single most important health-promoting intervention we perform as health care providers, and that you can perform as parents/caregivers. The recommended vaccines and the recommended schedule for their administration are the results of years and years of scientific study and data-gathering on hundreds of thousands of children by thousands of our brightest scientists and physicians.

We firmly believe, therefore, that vaccination is preventive medicine at its finest.

These things being said, we recognize that there has always been and will likely always be controversy surrounding vaccination. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin, persuaded by his brother, was opposed to smallpox vaccine until scientific data convinced him otherwise. Tragically he had delayed inoculating his son Franky, who contracted smallpox and died at the age of 4 years, leaving Franklin with a lifetime of guilt and remorse as detailed in his autobiography:

In 1736, I lost one of my sons, a fine boy of four years old, by the smallpox. ... I long regretted bitterly, and still regret that I had not given it to him by inoculation. This is for the sake of parents who omit that operation, on the supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a child died under it, my example showing that the regret may be the same either way, and that, therefore the safer should be chosen.

The vaccine campaign is truly a victim of its own success. It is precisely because vaccines are so effective at preventing illness that we are even discussing whether or not they should be given. Because of vaccines, many of you have never seen a child with polio, tetanus, whooping cough, bacterial meningitis or even chickenpox, or known a friend or family member whose child died of one of these diseases. Such successes can make us complacent or even lazy about vaccinating. But such an attitude, if it becomes widespread, can only lead to tragic results.

In the US, the measles vaccine had been so widely embraced that we had seen a reduction of more than 99% in measles cases, compared to the pre-vaccine era. However a recent outbreak of measles points to a dangerous trend among some parents who are not immunizing their children against measles or other diseases. This poses a real risk to the health of all unvaccinated children. In August 2008, the CDC announced that 15 children under 20 had been hospitalized with the disease and 131 had been diagnosed since the beginning of 2008. Many of the children who were diagnosed had not been vaccinated by choice, or were too young. It is believed that the sick children contracted measles from children who traveled overseas. Similar outbreaks have occurred with mumps and other preventable diseases recently and increased international travel will continue to put children at risk for preventable diseases.

Furthermore, those relatively few who choose not to vaccinate are taking selfish advantage of thousands of others of us who do vaccinate our children. Because they are largely surrounded by vaccinated children, these unvaccinated children may "skate by" so to speak and not fall victim to any of the vaccine-preventable diseases. In addition, this refusal to vaccinate undercuts a very important concept of vaccination: herd immunity. Herd immunity is the benefit everyone receives from a vaccinated population once immunization reaches a critical level. When enough people are vaccinated, everyone- including those that are too young or too sick to be immunized- receives some protection from the spread of diseases.

We, the providers of Children's Medical Group of Saginaw Bay, have all vaccinated our own children to protect them (and those around them), knowing full well that there is clearly a degree of discomfort and unpleasantness associated with the process, but also knowing that it is the right thing to do. As is so often the case in life, the right thing isn't always painless or easy, and usually involves a degree of sacrifice.

We are making you aware of these facts not to scare you or to coerce you, but to emphasize the importance of vaccinating your child. We recognize that the choice may be a very emotional one for some parents. We hope that you will trust our judgment in vaccinating your child according to the recommended immunization schedule.

We are no longer going to passively endorse, by accommodating, alternative immunization schedules that are not based on any scientific data. Indeed, in our experience most of these alternative schedules have been suggested by a family friend or someone at work or church. Unlike the recommended schedules, these "custom" schedules have not been rigorously tested on hundreds of thousands of children for safety and/or effectiveness. Moreover, delaying the administration of certain vaccines can increase the risk to your child of contracting the disease that vaccine was meant to protect against. **If you request an alternate infant vaccination series or absolutely refuse to vaccinate your child, we will ask you to find another health care provider who shares your views. We do not keep a list of such providers, nor would we recommend any such physician/healthcare provider. Please recognize that by not vaccinating you are putting your child at risk and are declining one of the best interventions our society has to offer in terms of preventive healthcare.**

As medical professionals, we feel very strongly that vaccinating children on schedule with the currently recommended and available vaccines is absolutely the right thing to do for all children and young adults. Thank you for your time in reading this policy and please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about vaccines with any of us.

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