



## Documenting Parental Refusal to Have Their Children Vaccinated

141 Northwest Point Blvd  
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098  
Phone: 847/434-4000  
Fax: 847/434-8000  
E-mail: kidsdocs@aap.org  
www.aap.org

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Despite our best efforts to educate parents about the need to vaccinate their children through discussions of vaccine-preventable diseases, the effectiveness of vaccines in preventing them, and the realistic chances of vaccine-associated adverse events, some will decline to have their children vaccinated. The incredible success of immunizations in dramatically reducing the incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases has led to an increased public focus on vaccine safety. Even though scientific data and doctors solidly support the fact that vaccines are safe and effective, research on hypotheses about harmful side effects often is taken out of context. Safety concerns, some appropriate and many inappropriate but widely discussed in the media and on unmonitored and biased Web sites, cause substantial and often unrealistic fears.

Although most parents believe they are safe, up to 25% have important misconceptions about vaccine safety that may lead the parents to refuse some or all immunizations for their children. According to an AAP Periodic Survey of Fellows, 79% of pediatricians have had one or more instances of parents refusing to allow their child or children to be vaccinated. About 10% of pediatricians report 10% or more of parents are avoiding vaccines because of safety concerns.

All parents and patients should be informed about the risks and benefits of preventive and therapeutic procedures, including vaccination. In the case of vaccination, federal law mandates this discussion. Despite doctors' and nurses' best efforts to explain its importance, some families will refuse vaccination for their children. The use of this or a similar form, demonstrating the importance you place on appropriate immunizations and focusing the parent's attention on the unnecessary risk for which they are accepting responsibility, may in some instances induce a wavering parent to accept your recommendations.

In addition to concern for the health of their unimmunized patients, doctors and nurses may be concerned about liability. The American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Infectious Diseases and Committee on Medical Liability state that documentation in the patient's medical record of the efforts of physicians to communicate vaccine risks and benefits may help to decrease potential liability should a vaccine-preventable disease occur in the unimmunized patient (American Academy of Pediatrics. *Red Book: 2006 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. Pickering LK, ed. 27th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2006:5-8, and American Academy of Pediatrics. *Medical Liability for Pediatricians*. Berger JE, Deitschel C, eds. 6th ed. American Academy of Pediatrics; 2004:97-98).

This form may be used as a template for such documentation but should not be considered a legal document and should not substitute for legal advice from a qualified health care attorney. Completion of a form, in and of itself, never substitutes for good risk communication, nor would it provide absolute immunity from liability. For instances in which parents refuse vaccine administration, health care providers should take advantage of their ongoing relationship with the family and revisit the immunization discussion on subsequent visits. Documentation in the medical record of such re-discussion is strongly suggested. Physicians have been held responsible for harm under circumstances in which a test was recommended by the physician and refused by the patient, because the jury found that the physician did not adequately convey the seriousness of the matter or only discussed the issue on one occasion.

This form may be duplicated **or changed** to suit your needs and your patients' needs.

The Section on Infectious Diseases and other contributing sections and committees hope this form will be helpful to you as you deal with parents who refuse immunizations. It will be available on the AAP Web site ([www.aap.org/bookstore](http://www.aap.org/bookstore)), the Section on Infectious Diseases Web site (<http://www.aap.org/sections/infectdis/index.cfm>), and the Web site for the Academy's Childhood Immunization Support Program ([www.cispimmunize.org/](http://www.cispimmunize.org/))

Sincerely,

Ellen Wald, MD, FAAP  
Chairperson  
AAP Section on Infectious Diseases

Ed Rothstein, MD, FAAP  
AAP Section on Infectious Diseases

## Refusal to Vaccinate

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Child's ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My child's doctor/nurse, \_\_\_\_\_ has advised me that my child (named above) should receive the following vaccines:

### Recommended

- Hepatitis B vaccine
- Diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (DTaP or Tdap) vaccine
- Diphtheria tetanus (DT or Td) vaccine
- Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) vaccine
- Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine
- Inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV)
- Measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMRV) vaccine
- Measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine
- Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine
- Influenza (flu) vaccine
- Meningococcal vaccine
- Hepatitis A vaccine
- Rotavirus vaccine
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Declined

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I have read the Vaccine Information Sheet(s) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explaining the vaccine(s) and the disease(s) they prevent. I have had the opportunity to discuss these with my child's doctor or nurse, who has answered all of my questions regarding the recommended vaccine(s). I understand the following:

- The **purpose** of and the need for the recommended vaccine(s)
- The **risks and benefits** of the recommended vaccine(s)
- If my child does not receive the vaccine(s), **the consequences** may include:
  - contracting the illness the vaccine should prevent (the outcomes of these illnesses may include one or more of the following: pneumonia, illness requiring hospitalization, death, brain damage, meningitis, seizures, and deafness. Other severe and permanent effects from these vaccine-preventable diseases are possible as well)
  - transmitting the disease to others
  - requiring my child to stay out of child care or school during disease outbreaks
- My child's doctor or nurse, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention all strongly recommend that these vaccines be given according to recommendations

Nevertheless, I have decided at this time to decline the vaccine(s) recommended for my child, as indicated above, by checking the appropriate box under the column titled "declined."

I know that failure to follow the recommendations about vaccination may endanger the health or life of my child and others with which my child might come into contact.

I know that I may re-address this issue with my child's doctor or nurse at any time and that I may change my mind and accept vaccination for my child anytime in the future.

I acknowledge that I have read this document in its entirety and fully understand it.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I have had the opportunity to re-discuss my decision not to vaccinate my child and still decline the recommended immunizations.

Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Parental Refusal to Accept Vaccination: Resources for Pediatricians

The following are some of the resources available to help pediatricians develop a productive dialogue with vaccine-hesitant parents and answer questions about vaccine risks and benefits:

### Web sites

1. AAP's Childhood Immunization Support Program (CISP)  
Information for providers and parents.  
[www.cispimmunize.org](http://www.cispimmunize.org)
2. The Immunization Education Program (IEP) of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Includes answers to common vaccine questions and topics, such as addressing vaccine safety concerns, evaluating anti-vaccine claims; sources of accurate immunization information on the Web; and talking with parents about vaccine safety.  
[www.paaap.org/immunize/](http://www.paaap.org/immunize/)
3. The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC)  
The IAC works to increase immunization rates by creating and distributing educational materials for health professionals and the public that enhance the delivery of safe and effective immunization services. Their "Unprotected People Reports" are case reports, personal testimonies, and newspaper and journal articles about people who have suffered or died from vaccine-preventable diseases.  
<http://www.immunize.org/stories/>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Immunization Program  
Information about vaccine safety, including Parents' Guide to Childhood Immunizations.  
[www.cdc.gov/nip/home-hcp.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/home-hcp.htm)
5. National Network of Immunization Information (NNii)  
Includes the NNii Resource Kit – Communicating with Patients about Immunizations. A guide to help answer patients' questions and provide the facts about immunizations.  
[www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)
6. Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
Information for parents includes Common Concerns About Vaccines, Are Vaccines Safe, and A Look at Each Vaccine.  
[www.vaccine.chop.edu](http://www.vaccine.chop.edu)
7. Institute for Vaccine Safety, Johns Hopkins University  
Provides an independent assessment of vaccines and vaccine safety to help guide decision makers and educate physicians, the public, and the media about key issues surrounding the safety of vaccines.  
[www.vaccinesafety.edu](http://www.vaccinesafety.edu)
8. The Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion (CCIAP)  
CCIAP aims to meet the goal of eliminating vaccine-preventable disease through education, promotion, advocacy, and media relations. It includes resources for parents and providers, including "How to advise parents unsure about immunization" by Scott A. Halperin, MD.  
<http://www.immunize.cpha.ca/english/index-e.htm>

### Journal Articles

1. Ball LK, Evans G, Bostrom A. Risky business: challenges in vaccine risk communication. *Pediatrics*. 1998;101:453-458. Available at: <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/101/3/453> (subscription needed)
2. Dias M, Marcuse EK. When parents resist immunizations. *Contemp Pediatr*. 2000;17:75-86

3. Offit PA, Jew RK. Addressing parents' concerns: do vaccines contain harmful preservatives, adjuvants, additives, or residuals? *Pediatrics*. 2003;112:1394-1397
4. Offit PA, Quarles J, Gerber MA, et al. Addressing parents' concerns: do multiple vaccines overwhelm or weaken the infant's immune system? *Pediatrics*. 2002;109:124-129
5. Diekema DS, and American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Bioethics. Responding to parental refusals of immunization of children. *Pediatrics*. 2005;115:1428-1431

#### Books

1. Offit PA, Bell LM. *Vaccines: What Every Parent Should Know*. New York, NY: IDG Books; 1999
2. Humiston SG, Good C. *Vaccinating Your Child: Questions and Answers for the Concerned Parent*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers; 2000
3. Fisher MC. *Immunizations and Infectious Diseases: An Informed Parent's Guide*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2005
4. Marshall GS, Dennehy PH, Greenberg DP, Offit PA, Tan TQ. *The Vaccine Handbook: A Practical Guide for Clinicians*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2003

## Reliable Immunization Resources for Parents

### Web sites

1. AAP's Childhood Immunization Support Program (CISP)  
Information for providers and parents.  
[www.cispimmunize.org](http://www.cispimmunize.org)
2. Why Should I Immunize My Child?  
A description of the individual diseases and the benefits expected from vaccination.  
[www.cispimmunize.org/fam/why.html](http://www.cispimmunize.org/fam/why.html)
3. The Immunization Education Program (IEP) of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Includes answers to common vaccine questions and topics, such as addressing vaccine safety concerns; evaluating anti-vaccine claims; sources of accurate immunization information on the Web; and talking with parents about vaccine safety.  
[www.paaap.org/immunize/](http://www.paaap.org/immunize/)
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Immunization Program  
Information about vaccine safety, including Parents' Guide to Childhood Immunizations  
[www.cdc.gov/nip/home-hcp.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/home-hcp.htm)
5. National Network of Immunization Information (NNii)  
Includes the NNii Resource Kit – Communicating with Patients about Immunizations. A guide to help answer patients' questions and provide the facts about immunizations.  
[www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)
6. Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
Information for parents includes Common Concerns About Vaccines, Are Vaccines Safe, and A Look at Each Vaccine.  
[www.vaccine.chop.edu](http://www.vaccine.chop.edu)
7. Institute for Vaccine Safety, Johns Hopkins University  
Provides an independent assessment of vaccines and vaccine safety to help guide decision makers and educate physicians, the public and the media about key issues surrounding the safety of vaccines.  
[www.vaccinesafety.edu](http://www.vaccinesafety.edu)
8. The Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion (CCIAP)  
CCIAP aims to meet the goal of eliminating vaccine-preventable disease through education, promotion, advocacy, and media relations. It includes resources for parents and providers, including "How to advise parents unsure about immunization" by Scott A. Halperin, MD.  
<http://www.immunize.cpha.ca/english/index-e.htm>

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