



## Objective

To identify common causes of parental anxiety regarding childhood vaccinations and seek suggestions for parents to overcome their anxiety.

## Background

- Parents do not always return on-time for vaccinations as scheduled
- Parents' willingness to immunize children in a timely manner can be affected by emotions/distress exhibited by crying/anxiety of their children
- Identifying specific triggers of parental anxiety regarding childhood vaccinations may promote more timely return

## Demographics

### Parents

- Sample size: 36
- 88% Female
- 53% ages 26-35, 35% ages 36-55
- 97% married
- 35% had only 1 child

### Children

- Mean number of children in household: 2.18
- 85% aged 2-5 years
- Mean age: 5.73 years

## Method

- Informed consent obtained from parents
- Recruitment with flyers and newspaper ads
- 4 one-hour focus groups conducted
- Parents questioned about causes of vaccine-related anxiety
- \$25 incentive provided for participation



Photo from: <http://afteramerica.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/child-doesnt-like-shots3.jpg>

## Qualitative Results

Six themes (three common causes of anxiety and three recommendations) were identified from the focus groups:

### Common Causes of Anxiety

#### 1. Parental Anxiety Prior to Immunization

- Guilt of “doing the right thing” when immunization may have risks and side effects
- Perceived mixed messages from health care providers or media
  - Parents believed that childrens' immune system not fully developed until older
  - Parents believed that harm would occur from content of vaccination

*“I was anxious about giving an immunization and about not giving an immunization, so no matter what, [I] will have that anxiety.”*

#### 2. Parental Anxiety During Immunization

- Obligated to be present to comfort child but traumatized when child was restrained
- Concerned over number of shots administered at the same visit
- Reported that child gender/personality influences parent's experience

*“I was holding his hands and he was looking at me with that big smile and as soon as the doctor you know put the needle in his leg, I could see his face just transforming. And for me that was a feeling of betrayal for myself to my son.”*

#### 3. Parental Anxiety After Immunization

- Parents worried about physical side effects (i.e. fever and site tenderness), especially those listed on the Vaccine Information Sheets (VIS)
- Parents reported there were interruptions to daily routine with “sick” child for days following immunization

*“My anxieties don't so much rest with like the actual needle or the shot, but more with what the shot will do.”*

## Recommendations

### 1. Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

- Manage/set-up follow-up appointment quickly
- Don't require parents to restrain child
- Don't rush office visit, allow time to answer questions

*“[W]hat really helped me is that [my doctor] was willing to just sit there and spend 25 minutes and just talk to me.”*

### 2. Information Issues

- Take time to explain terminology
- Autism is still a major concern of parents, even though they recognize scientific information discounts a correlation between autism and immunizations
- Recommend credible sources of information
- Parents want to know why immunization dosing is not adjusted on child's weight
- Consider shortening Vaccine Information Sheet (VIS), including a website where parent can go later for more in-depth information
- VIS with too much information for some parents and not enough for other parents

*“I mean they give you two sided sheets every time for every single shot – you read all the risks and it's just like, ‘I'm not a nurse.’”*

### 3. Other Miscellaneous Points

- “Newer” immunizations (HPV or H1N1) invoke more worry than established immunizations
- Most parents rely on healthcare provider for advice

*“[My doctor said] ‘you know I would give them to my children’ and he said ‘I've done a lot of research. I wouldn't just do anything... but I have confidence in doing it.’”*

## Implications for Practice

### Strategies to Help Parents Overcome Anxiety

- “Shots Made Easy”
- Credible websites:
  - [www.cispimmunize.org](http://www.cispimmunize.org)
  - [www.vaccineinformation.org](http://www.vaccineinformation.org)
  - [www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)
  - [www.vaccine.chop.edu](http://www.vaccine.chop.edu)