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The AAP gets tough on vaccine dissenters

The American Academy of Pediatrics is growing so concerned about the climbing rate of vaccine exemptions--and the possible affect on community health--that it recently formed a group called the "Immunization Alliance" to address the growing refusal of some parents to vaccinate.

In a letter sent to members, the AAP identified the following as problems:

- "Parent-to-parent spread of myths."
- "A public that does not understand the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases."
- "Unbalanced Internet and media exposure."
- "Decreased trust in the government and health care providers."
- "Slow response to negative news coverage."
- "Increasing calls for philosophical exemptions."

But here's a problem the AAP missed: The sheer number of recommended and mandated vaccines is freaking parents out. And [new combo shots](#) that contain a stew of four or five different vaccines aren't going to help matters.

In 1982, The Centers for Disease Control recommended **23 doses of 7 vaccines** for children up to age 6.

Today, the CDC recommends that children get **48 doses of 12 vaccines by age 6**. That's a lot. Toss in flu shots for all infants and children and it boosts the number of recommended vaccines for children to 69 doses of 16 vaccines by age 18.

The two new combo shots approved yesterday by a federal advisory panel don't change the schedule; they just reduce the number of individual shots. GlaxoSmithKline's four-in-one shot offers protection against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio. Sanofi Pasteur's five-in-one shot is for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and illness due to Haemophilus influenzae type b, or HiB.

But parents who are already asking doctors to unbundle the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine because they want their child to have individual vaccines aren't likely to embrace a five-shot cocktail. The new shots are also likely to raise questions, concerns and storage issues.

And how does the AAP plan to handle it? The organization will not talk about choice or informed consent, issues that should be raised with any medical procedure that carries a risk.

Instead, the AAP suggests in a sample letter to pediatricians, that physicians tell parents who refuse to vaccinate that they have a "self-centered and unacceptable attitude" since your

child is getting protection from others who have chosen to vaccinate.

And if you absolutely refuse to vaccinate your child despite your physician's efforts, you could be booted from your pediatrician's practice. The sample letter to doctors from the AAP recommends saying:

"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."

Originally posted: July 3, 2008

The AAP responds to 'vaccine dissenters'

Below, I've posted the response by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to my recent blog item [The AAP gets tough on vaccine dissenters](#).

In the piece, I pointed out that some parents are unnerved by the sheer number of shots that are currently recommended and in many cases, mandated. The new combo vaccines are sure to raise more questions and concerns, especially since parents are currently trying to unbundle the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) shot.

In the rebuttal, which will appear Wednesday in the Chicago Tribune's Voice of the People section, AAP president Renee Jenkins emphasized the safety of vaccines, even though I never directly addressed the issue. She added: "The number of vaccines has increased because new vaccines have been developed to prevent more diseases. That is a good thing."

She also says, "Pediatricians spend many hours in their day counseling parents about the safety and importance of immunization and answering their specific questions."

Has this been your experience? Was I "less than fair?" Or should parents be tossed out of the doctor's office for refusing shots, which is what the AAP suggests?

Here is her full letter:

New vaccines are preventing more diseases

"The American Academy of Pediatrics is disappointed that a premier newspaper like the Chicago Tribune would publish such a one-sided, fear-mongering report as columnist Julie Deardorff's June 27 blog post, "The AAP gets tough on vaccine dissenters."

"Deardorff parrots the misleading pseudoscience of the most strident anti-vaccine Web sites and the scare tactics of celebrity-funded ad campaigns. In quoting the number of vaccines children receive today compared to 1982, Deardorff takes the extra step to write the numbers

in boldfaced type, suggesting she believes these numbers alone should give parents pause about immunizing their children.

"The fact is, today's vaccines are safer than any in history. Current vaccines are more refined than older versions, so children receive fewer immune-challenging antigens overall even though they get a larger number of immunizations.

"It's true that doctors recommend more vaccines for children today than they did two decades ago. The number of vaccines has increased because new vaccines have been developed to prevent more diseases. That is a good thing. That means children will not have to suffer devastating diseases such as Hib meningitis, which once killed 600 children a year and left thousands more with deafness, seizures and mental retardation. The vaccine available today has wiped out 98 percent of these cases.

"Deardorff is less than fair in her depiction of how the American Academy of Pediatrics is responding to parents with questions about vaccines. Pediatricians spend many hours in their day counseling parents about the safety and importance of immunization and answering their specific questions. Pediatricians want to provide parents with accurate information; our job is made all the harder by misleading reports like this one."

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