

Hunterdon Pediatric Associates Statement on Vaccine Hesitancy and Refusal

The physicians and nurse practitioners of HPA know that vaccines are safe and effective and prevent serious and potentially life-threatening infections. We expect that all of the children we care for will receive all vaccines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Unfortunately, a small number of parents who are vaccine hesitant, either amend the recommended vaccine schedule or outright refuse them. We believe this is a bad decision. Reasons vary but include:

- Concerns about safety
- Worry that multiple vaccines will “overwhelm” their child’s immune system
- Think that ingredients that stabilize and enhance the effectiveness of vaccines are dangerous
- Belief that vaccine side-effects are severe and dangerous

We know through research, testing and years of experience that vaccines are: safe, effective, have no bad effect on the immune system, have safe added ingredients, and generally cause no or mild self-limited side effects.

When parents either want to amend their child’s vaccine schedule or refuse vaccines, we let them know that we disagree with their choice and try our best to educate them about the importance of vaccines and try to allay their fears, knowing that many parents will change their minds and allow full vaccination of their children.

We do not dismiss children from our practice if their parents do not vaccinate them.

The reasons are:

- As stated above, over time through education and development of a trusting relationship, many parents will eventually vaccinate their children
- We do much more than give vaccines, such as: well child care, screening for medical and mental health problems and treating acute and chronic illnesses. Children, who have no say in their parent’s decision to not vaccinate, deserve this care also.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends against dismissal of patients whose parents are vaccine hesitant or refusers and states it should only be done as “a very last resort.”
- One condition that must be met if a patient is dismissed from a practice, is that the pediatrician must be able to refer these patients to another accessible source of pediatric care. Since HPA, along with the majority of family physicians in Hunterdon County are employed by the the Hunterdon Healthcare system, dismissing unvaccinated children from these practices would make local and easily accessible healthcare for these children a significant burden
- Although there is a risk of exposure to a vaccine preventable disease from an unvaccinated child in our office, it is extremely small. Most children who contract whooping cough (pertussis) do so from adults and recent measles outbreaks arose from contact in public spaces.

HPA strongly believes in the importance of vaccination and will continue to make it a priority to vaccinate all children in our practice!