

Alternative Vaccine Schedules:

Helping Parents Separate Fact From Fear



A Guide for Physicians

Parents want to keep their children safe and healthy. Help empower parents to make an informed decision about vaccinating their kids. Questions about the recommended immunization schedule create an opportunity for you to listen and respond to requests for “alternative schedules,” including the Dr. Bob Sears’ schedule. We offer these tips to assist practitioners to respond effectively and compassionately and to build trusting relationships with patients and parents.

► **CONCERN: CDC schedules seem generic; alternative schedules cater to individual needs**

The immunization schedule exists to protect children at the age they are most vulnerable to each disease. Children are vaccinated as soon as they are developmentally able to create an effective immune response.

Explain: Alternative schedules are not custom-made. That’s actually what doctors do. Doctors consider a patient’s medical history and give the best advice for each child. Shots are especially important to many medically-vulnerable kids (whose parents may be concerned about vaccines).

Ask: *Do you have specific concerns about your child’s health? Let’s talk about it.*

► **CONCERN: “Too many” vaccines, “too soon” could be harmful**

Are there more vaccines now than 20 years ago? Yes—and that’s a good thing. Newer vaccines save children from terrible diseases like Meningococcal disease. This devastating infection can cause organ failure, limb amputations, and brain damage. Postponing shots increases the time a child is defenseless. Recent outbreaks of measles and Hib tell us that postponing shots puts healthy kids at risk for diseases none of us thought would come back.

Explain: A baby’s immune system can handle multiple shots with weakened or killed virus much better than it can fight off a serious disease. Postponing shots means your child could get sick and risk serious complications. It’s obvious you want to protect your child, but alternative schedules take advantage of parents’ worries; they’re not based on science.

Ask: *Which vaccines are causing you worry?*

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► **CONCERN: Doctors give more shots than needed because they make a profit or are influenced by drug companies**

Most doctors do *not* profit from administering vaccines, and drug companies do not set the recommended schedule. CDC's and AAP's recommendations come from medical and science experts in an open, transparent public process.

Explain: We believe in vaccines because we consider it a tragedy when any child gets sick from a preventable disease. We vaccinate our own kids.

Ask: *Can you tell me more about your concerns? Does it help to know that we do not get any money from drug companies to give vaccines?*

► **CONCERN: Alternative schedules reduce exposure to vaccine ingredients.**

Groups that raise fears about vaccine ingredients do not have scientific evidence to support their claims. Spreading out shots means more trips to the doctor without any real benefit to the child.

Explain: While some vaccine ingredients sound scary, safety studies show that vaccine ingredients are safe. In fact, every vaccine ingredient is used for a reason—often to make sure the vaccine is free of contamination and creates the immune response it's supposed to create.

Aluminum gets attention now as a vaccine ingredient some groups say could be harmful. The truth is, aluminum is a naturally occurring element

found in many foods including fruits and vegetables. It helps trigger the body's immune response, and some vaccines need it to work. The tiny amounts used in vaccines are very safe.

Ask: *Did you know aluminum is found at higher levels in breast milk and infant formula than in vaccines?*

Thimerosal was removed as a preservative from all children's vaccines by 2002 (except multi-dose vials of influenza vaccine). California law also now does not permit children under 3 to get thimerosal-containing vaccines. Even so, autism rates have remained the same. Scientific research continues to show no link between thimerosal and autism.

Ask: *Did you know autism experts support vaccines? Over 20 scientific studies have failed to show a connection between thimerosal in vaccines and autism. Can you tell me about your concerns?*

► **CONCERN: Waiting on some vaccines is fine since the diseases are so rare in the U.S.**

U.S. Disease rates are low because immunization rates are high overall. But there are California schools where 30% or more of kids are missing recommended shots. This means your children may be surrounded by others who are susceptible to diseases and could get them sick. A 2009 study showed that a child without DTaP shots is 23 times more likely to get whooping cough.

Explain: Measles reached epidemic levels in England, Switzerland, and Japan because fewer children have received MMR shots. Children have even died. Today, diseases are just a plane ride away from any California city. Recently, we had outbreaks of measles in San Diego and whooping cough in Contra Costa. These caused children to get sick, schools to close, and parents to take weeks off work to keep quarantined children at home.

Ask: *Does your family ever travel abroad? Have you thought about how many foreign tourists visit California?*



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► **CONCERN: Waiting on some vaccines is fine because the diseases aren't a big deal.**

Infectious diseases are a big deal. Hib and meningococcal disease can kill. Even chickenpox lands some children in the hospital. Whooping cough and measles can be fatal to babies. Even if a child's illness is not severe, it still means extra doctor visits and days off work or school. Any child exposed to a contagious person may need to stay at home for weeks if not immunized.

Ask: If skipping recommended shots, do you have a plan for how to keep your child at home for several weeks? Could you afford to take the time off work?

► **CONCERN: It's nobody else's business if you skip some vaccines for your child**

It's true that this is a choice a parent must make. But that choice carries a responsibility. If your child gets sick, others in your family or household are also likely to get sick. If someone who's at high risk—like a pregnant woman or a relative with asthma—catches the disease from your child, s/he could get gravely ill.

Explain: We have learned to be careful about the dangers of second-hand smoke. Contagious diseases are similar. Without vaccinations, we're exposing others to dangerous diseases.

Ask: What would you think if someone smoked right next to your child? Do you think there might be high-risk people who live near you who need to be protected from preventable diseases?

► **CONCERN: Parents who read about alternative schedules on the Internet and books know as much as any doctor.**

Groups or individuals with websites can misinterpret data or make claims based on flawed studies. Respected medical associations continuously educate providers with peer-reviewed, science-based vaccine information allowing the provider to make the best medical decisions for individual patients.

Ask: How do you ensure the information you read is reliable? What makes you trust one point of view over another?



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Make your research work for you

Be choosy about what you read and the information you rely on.

We recommend these trusted sites:

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org/immunization

National Network for Immunization

www.immunizationinfo.org

Thimerosal FAQs

www.fda.gov/CBER/vaccine/thimerosal.htm

Do Vaccines Cause That? (Book)

www.i4ph.org

Evaluating Health Information on the Web

www.immunizationinfo.org/parents/evaluatingWeb.cfm

Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases

www.pkids.org

Every Child By Two

www.ecbt.org

Vaccine Education Center

(Children's Hospital of Philadelphia)

www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/home.html

Johns Hopkins Institute for Vaccine Safety

www.vaccinesafety.edu

Centers for Disease Control

www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/concerns

I Choose campaign

www.whyichoose.org

The California Immunization Coalition (CIC) is a non-profit, public-private partnership dedicated to achieving and maintaining full immunization protection to promote health and prevent serious illness across the life span.

California Immunization Coalition

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