

Sample Vaccine Policy Statement

Ready for you to adapt for your practice

Use the vaccine policy statement below as is, or modify it to reflect your practice's own strong statement of support for the vital role vaccination plays in safeguarding the health of children. Your practice's clearly expressed commitment to immunization can be powerfully persuasive with parents who are hesitant to have their child vaccinated because of scientifically invalid information they have encountered on the Internet or through the news media. The policy statement below was developed by clinicians at All Star Pediatrics in Lionville, Penn., where it is

posted in every exam room and given to parents at the prenatal "meet and greet" and newborn visit. The results have been that parents new to All Star Pediatrics know exactly where their doctors stand on immunization, and the families of established patients feel supported in the choice they've made to immunize their children. The following statement was originally published as a letter to the editor in AAP News, May 2008, by Bradley J. Dyer, MD, FAAP, and his colleagues at All Star Pediatrics.

[Your practice name here] Vaccine Policy Statement

- We firmly believe in the effectiveness of vaccines to prevent serious illness and to save lives.
- We firmly believe in the safety of our vaccines.
- We firmly believe that all children and young adults should receive all of the recommended vaccines according to the schedule published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- We firmly believe, based on all available literature, evidence, and current studies, that vaccines do not cause autism or other developmental disabilities. We firmly believe that thimerosal, a preservative that has been in vaccines for decades and remains in some vaccines, does not cause autism or other developmental disabilities.
- We firmly believe that vaccinating children and young adults may be the single most important health-promoting intervention we perform as health care providers, and that you can perform as parents/caregivers. The recommended vaccines and their schedule given are the results of years and years of scientific study and data gathering on millions of children by thousands of our brightest scientists and physicians.

These things being said, we recognize that there has always been and will likely always be controversy surrounding vaccination. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin, persuaded by his brother, was opposed to smallpox vaccine until scientific data convinced him otherwise. Tragically, he had delayed inoculating his favorite son Franky, who contracted smallpox and died at the age of 4, leaving Ben with a lifetime of guilt and remorse. Quoting Mr. Franklin's autobiography:

"In 1736, I lost one of my sons, a fine boy of four years old, by the smallpox . . . I long regretted bitterly, and still regret that I had not given it to him by inoculation. This I mention for the sake of parents who omit that operation, on the supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a child died under it, my example showing that the regret may be the same either way, and that, therefore, the safer should be chosen."

The vaccine campaign is truly a victim of its own success. It is precisely because vaccines are so effective at preventing illness that we are even discussing whether or not they should be given. Because of vaccines, many of you have never seen a child with polio, tetanus, whooping cough, bacterial meningitis, or even chickenpox, or known a friend or family member whose child died of one of these diseases. Such success can make us complacent or even lazy about vaccinating. But such an attitude, if it becomes widespread, can only lead to tragic results.

After publication of an unfounded accusation (later retracted) that MMR vaccine caused autism in 1998, many people in Europe chose not to vacci-

nate their children. As a result of underimmunization, there were large outbreaks of measles, with several deaths from complications of the disease. In 2010 there were more than 3000 cases of whooping cough in California, with nine deaths in children less than six months of age. Again, many of those who contracted the illness (and then passed it on to the infants, who were too young to have been fully vaccinated) had made a conscious decision not to vaccinate.

Furthermore, by not vaccinating your child you are taking selfish advantage of thousands of others who do vaccinate their children, which decreases the likelihood that your child will contract one of these diseases. We feel such an attitude to be self-centered and unacceptable.

We are making you aware of these facts not to scare you or coerce you, but to emphasize the importance of vaccinating your child. We recognize that the choice may be a very emotional one for some parents. We will do everything we can to convince you that vaccinating according to the schedule is the right thing to do. However, **should you have doubts, please discuss these with your health care provider in advance of your visit.** In some cases, we may alter the schedule to accommodate parental concerns or reservations. **Please be advised, however, that delaying or "breaking up the vaccines" to give one or two at a time over two or more visits goes against expert recommendations, and can put your child at risk for serious illness (or even death) and goes against our medical advice as providers at [Your practice name here].** Such additional visits will require additional co-pays on your part. Furthermore, please realize that you will be required to sign a "Refusal to Vaccinate" acknowledgement in the event of lengthy delays.

All patients in the practice are required to receive a minimum of DTaP, Hib, polio, and pneumococcal vaccines by three months of age, all AAP-recommended immunizations by two years of age, and meningococcal vaccine and booster doses of Tdap and varicella vaccines by age 12 years.

Finally, if you should absolutely refuse to vaccinate your child despite all our efforts, 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. Please recognize that by not vaccinating you are putting your child at unnecessary risk for life-threatening illness and disability, and even death.

As medical professionals, we feel very strongly that vaccinating children on schedule with currently available vaccines is absolutely the right thing to do for all children and young adults. Thank you for your time in reading this policy, and please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about vaccines with any one of us.