

## Talking Points & Message

in response to the Missouri State Medical Association's Vaccination Campaign  
*Missouri Medicine: Are Parents Avoiding Vaccinations Because of Safety Fears?*

- Kids are getting sick, even dying, from diseases like measles, pertussis, and hemophilus that are completely preventable with vaccinations.
- While modern vaccines are safe and effective, parents raise questions about vaccine safety, particularly with regard to autism, based on unbalanced media reports, passionate internet postings, and emotion-filled rumors, rather than evidence-based science.
- Andrew Wakefield's paper published in *The Lancet* in 1998, which posited a link between the Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism, continues to provide a focal point for vaccine opponents, despite the discovery of multiple conflicts of interest and unethical actions by the author prior to and since its publication, and the paper being formally retracted by *The Lancet* in 2010. He is barred from medical practice in his native England.
- If the number of children not being vaccinated continues to increase, we can once again expect epidemics to develop in children, especially in children school age and younger.
- While evidence-based arguments about the value of vaccination must be employed by physicians who care for children, we must also acknowledge and empathize with parents' powerful fears about vaccination if we are to convince them to overcome years of fear-mongering by vaccine opponents.
- Physicians who administer vaccines follow the recommendations and schedules from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Missouri State Medical Association policy supports the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines for immunization of children.
- Infants and children are exposed to many germs every day just by playing, eating, and breathing. Their immune systems fight those germs, also called antigens, to keep the body healthy. The amount of antigens that children fight every day (2,000-6,000) is much more than the antigens in any combination of vaccines on the current schedule (150 for the whole schedule). So children's immune systems are not overwhelmed by vaccines.
- Vaccines are actually very safe, despite implications to the contrary in many anti-vaccine publications. Most vaccine adverse events are minor and temporary, such as a sore arm or mild fever. These can often be controlled by taking acetaminophen before or after vaccination. More serious adverse events occur rarely (on the order of one per thousands to one per millions of doses), and some are so rare that risk cannot be accurately assessed. As for vaccines causing death, again so few deaths can plausibly be attributed to vaccines that it is hard to assess the risk statistically. The Institute of Medicine in its 1994 report states that the risk of death from vaccines is "extraordinarily low."

## **Resources:**

"Responding With Empathy to Parents' Fears of Vaccinations."

Missouri Medicine: January/February 2012; Vol 109:1;40-48. Copyright 2012 Missouri State Medical Association

"How the Case Against the MMR Vaccine Was Fixed"

British Medical Journal: January 5, 2011; 342;c5347

American Academy of Pediatrics 2011 Immunization Schedules

<http://www2.aap.org/immunization/IZSchedule.html>

Vaccines and Diseases

<http://www2.aap.org/immunization/illnesses/illnesses.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/default.htm>

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

<http://health.mo.gov/living/wellness/immunizations/index.php>