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To Vaccinate or Not To Vaccinate: That is the Question
Rodd Stockwell, MD

What kind of toys will my child play with? Where will my children sleep? What kinds of foods will we have at our house? Who will be my child's doctor? As parents, we make decisions every day that affect our own lives and the lives of our children. This can feel daunting at times. How will I know what is the right decision to make? There is so much to worry about.

I would like to encourage you to follow your heart. If your heart does not know what to do, then gather information and wait. **At the right time the way forward will be clear.**

Whether or not to vaccinate is one of the most important decisions a parent makes. Here are my thoughts on the subject. I encourage you to read these words with an open mind. Don't believe anything I say. Check it out for yourself. Bring into your life those things that fit for you and set aside the rest. Happy reading.

Won't my child need to be vaccinated for school? The laws vary from state to state. You can find information about your own state in the link at the end of this article which gives information on each state's laws. All states have a medical exemption but many have philosophical and religious exemptions as well. For the religious exemption usually you don't need to belong to a particular church, but you must document that you have a strong personal religious, or spiritual conviction that you no longer want to vaccinate your child. The laws about vaccination prior to school enrollment exist to strongly encourage parents to take responsibility for their child's health and vaccination status. The intent is not necessarily to force vaccination but to make certain that parents do not let this important decision slide by without attending to it.

Many doctors have strong convictions about vaccination. They have had a chance to think about the issue. It is important to find a doctor whose philosophy in this area matches your family's philosophy.

It is also important to be practical. Statistics suggest that it is less likely that your child will come down with vaccine related diseases if he or she is vaccinated. What if your child does get sick with chicken pox (varicella)? Is your life set up so that you can nurse your child through the illness? Do you feel comfortable doing that? Do you have a doctor you can call on to help you through?

Stress in life is linked to unmet expectations; the day we live is never exactly the same as the day we planned for. Whether or not one vaccinates, it is inappropriate to think your child will never be ill. Illnesses are unpredictable. They are a part of life. It is easier to make a clear decision about vaccinations if you know whether you'll be able to handle illnesses when they come up.

Finally, I would like to encourage you to consider the vaccinations one by one. The vaccines are all prepared differently. Each has its own ingredients. The diseases are also different from each other. You may determine that your child is at risk for one disease and none of the others, and so only choose that vaccine for your child. Educate yourself as much as you can. Many doctors today have never seen polio or measles. You can access the same information that they do. The more you know about the diseases involved and the way each vaccine is prepared, the easier it is to set aside the worries and fears of others and follow your heart.

Here are five questions I use with my patients when considering a vaccination:

- 1) Is my child at risk for the disease?
- 2) How easily is the disease diagnosed and treated?
- 3) How serious is the disease in most children?
- 4) How effective is the vaccine?
- 5) What are the possible side effects of the vaccine?

To encourage you in your reading let me throw out some facts. Did you know?

- The incidence of most vaccine treated diseases declined by 80-95% before the discovery of the vaccines. The decline was due to improved sanitation and water treatment in cities.
- There has not been a case of polio in the US since 1993 (except when caused by the vaccine itself).
- The vast majority of children who contract Rubella recover fully with no serious complications. In 50% it is hardly noticeable. This is true for many viral illnesses in childhood. Tetanus, on the other hand, usually requires hospitalization and may be fatal. If your child has a wound that could be contaminated with tetanus and your child has not received the tetanus vaccine, he or she will need immediate medical attention.
- The acellular pertussis vaccine still has a chance of causing seizures or encephalopathy, although the chance is lower than with the older pertussis vaccine.
- A child can have a reaction to so-called inactive ingredients in a vaccine. These include thimerosal (mercury), MSG, and formaldehyde.

You can see that To Vaccinate or Not To Vaccinate is an important question to answer. Once you have done your reading, I encourage you to ask yourself the following for each vaccine offered: **“What is more likely--a problem from the disease or a problem from the vaccine?”** Your response will depend on where you live, how old your child is, and so many other aspects of your life and lifestyle. For this reason, I believe there isn't one answer that applies to everyone. I do hope you will consider your choices carefully--your children will benefit.

Resources:

Information about vaccines and vaccine treated diseases:

US Center for Disease Control (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/>

The National Vaccine Information Center: www.nvic.org

State laws about vaccination: <http://www.909shot.com/state-site/state-exemptions.htm>

To report a vaccine reaction: <http://vaers.hhs.gov/>

Vaccine Ingredients: <http://www.knowvaccines.com/vaccineingredients.htm>

<http://www.informedchoice.info/cocktail.html>

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