

News release

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Getting the right shots at the right time saves lives *Oregon study looks at parents who don't follow the recommended vaccination schedule*

Most parents across the United States follow a carefully researched vaccine schedule for their children's immunizations to ensure their kids don't become ill – or worse – from vaccine-preventable diseases. But a new study published in *Pediatrics* shows that some Oregon parents are choosing an alternative immunization schedule that could put kids at risk. The study, "Frequency of alternative immunization schedule use in a metropolitan area," was published June 18 and looked at children who live in the Portland metro area.

"We know that most parents in Oregon follow the physician-recommended immunization schedule based on scientific research, which lines up with well-baby check-ups," says Steve Robison, an Oregon Health Authority epidemiologist and the study's lead author. "But what surprises and worries us is that the number of parents who follow an alternative schedule has increased in recent years."

Delaying vaccinations can put children at risk of contracting preventable diseases such as pertussis and measles. Not only are the unimmunized children at risk, but also others in the community, including infants and younger children who cannot yet be fully vaccinated. Infants, young children and immune-compromised individuals are at the greatest risk of severe complications or death from preventable diseases such as pertussis.

(more)

The study looked at kids in the Portland metro area who had only one or two shots per visit between 2003 and 2009, instead of all of the immunizations recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). In the first three years, only about 3 percent of Oregon infants had limited shots. But that rate rose dramatically from 2007 through 2009 to reach 9 percent, the rate where it is still holding steady.

"There are no known benefits to delaying or spacing out shots this way," says Robison. "But there are health risks. Additionally, parents will have to take their kids in for shots much more often, which costs time and money. It's also easy for a baby on an alternative schedule to fall behind and not catch up."

According to the study, children on alternative immunization schedules usually fall behind on their shots by 9 months of age, and don't catch up, at least by 19 months of age when most kids are done with the bulk of their shots.

The biggest worry, Robison says, is that babies will not be protected against terrible diseases such as whooping cough and pneumococcal infection at the time when they are most vulnerable to them. "The recommended schedule has been scientifically proven to immunize children in the safest, most effective way possible. Alternative schedules haven't been researched," says Robison.

Alternative schedules leave children and the entire community open to disease. Robison says that immunization is a simple and effective way to prevent disease and help make Oregon one of the healthiest states.

Pediatrics is the journal for the American Academy of Pediatrics. For more information on the recommended ACIP immunization schedule and vaccine safety, visit the Oregon Immunization Program at www.healthoregon.org/imm or call 971-673-0300.

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