

To immunize or exempt: A look at parents' beliefs about vaccinations and sources of healthcare information

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Objectives: This study examines associations between parents' beliefs about childhood immunizations, trusted sources of healthcare information, and decisions to immunize or exempt their children from school immunization requirements.

Methods: Parents of 3,301 randomly selected children in Oregon public and private elementary schools were surveyed by mail. Sampling for this case/control study was stratified by geographic location and by community rates of religious exemption to school immunization requirements. Logistic regression will be used to test whether parent beliefs and sources of information are predictive of exemption-seeking behavior.

Discussion: While childhood immunization rates remain high in the United States, some Oregon schools have begun to see an increase in requests for exemption from state-mandated vaccination requirements. Oregon school law requires school children to have complete vaccinations. Exemptions from vaccination requirements are allowed for reasons of personal or religious belief. To date, little is known about how parents make decisions about exemptions for their children. This study explores parent beliefs about the efficacy, need, and risks of childhood immunizations, who they trust for healthcare information, and how these factors inform their decisions whether or not to exempt their children from school immunization requirements. Findings will be of use to immunization providers and public health agencies as they respond to vaccine exemption challenges in the communities they serve.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify the sources of information parents use to make healthcare decisions for their family;
2. Describe parents' beliefs in the efficacy, risks, and need for childhood vaccinations; and
3. Discuss the healthcare preferences and vaccination beliefs of parents who choose not to comply with state immunization requirements, those who consider non-compliance, and those who fully vaccinate their children.

Keywords: immunization, decision-making