

Responding to Parental Refusals or Delays of Immunization of Children

The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) recommends that all children receive all vaccines recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Vaccines are one of the most effective ways to protect the health of children and prevent disease in the community.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), when surveyed, 7 of 10 pediatricians reported that they had a parent refuse an immunization on behalf of a child in the 12 months preceding the survey. The survey also found that a small number of pediatricians reported that they always (4.8%) or sometimes (18.1%) tell parents that they will no longer serve as the child's physician if, after educational efforts, the parents continue to refuse permission for an immunization.¹

The preferred practice when faced with a parent who delays or refuses immunization for his/her child:

1. The provider should listen and respectfully respond to the parent's concerns. The provider should provide accurate information about the benefits of immunization and risks of not immunizing.
2. The provider should offer educational materials or direct the parent to credible websites that discuss vaccine safety.
3. If after answering the parent's questions, the parent still refuses, the provider should document the discussion. Providers are recommended to have parents sign a refusal waiver. Sample waivers can be found at
 - a. AAP: www2.aap.org/immunization/pediatricians/pdf/RefusaltoVaccinate.pdf
 - b. Immunization Action Coalition: www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4059.pdf

Although the NDDoH strongly urges parents not to delay or refuse one or more vaccines for their child (unless necessary for medical reasons), the NDDoH feels strongly that providers should not discharge patients solely because a parent delays or refuses to immunize their child. Providers should use their ongoing relationship with the family as an opportunity to revisit the immunization discussion on each subsequent visit. The benefits of not discharging patients who delay or refuse vaccination are as follows:

1. The provider will have the ability to provide further education about the importance of vaccination.
2. For parents who only refuse some vaccines or delay vaccination, the child will at least receive some immunizations. If a patient is turned away, the child may not receive any immunizations.
3. The child will continue to have access to medical care, which is critical in a rural state.

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics, Division of Health Policy Research. *Periodic Survey of Fellows No. 48: Immunization Administration Practices*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2001.

The above recommendations are in accordance with the AAP, as outlined in their policy statement, which can be found at pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/115/5/1428.full.

The following organizations endorse these recommendations:

North Dakota Board of Nursing

North Dakota Chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians

North Dakota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

North Dakota Immunization Advisory Committee

North Dakota Medical Association