



Vaccine Policy Statement

Dear Parents,

We are aware that most of you understand the reasons and importance of vaccinating your child. However, we also know that you may be bombarded with misinformation and controversies that seem to be floating "out there". Therefore we want to take this opportunity to affirm our position on immunizations. We hope this will make you feel even more comfortable with this important part of your child's health care.

- We firmly believe in the effectiveness of vaccines to prevent serious illness and to save lives.
- We firmly believe in the safety of our vaccines.
- We firmly believe that all children and young adults should receive all of the recommended vaccines according to the schedule published by the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- We firmly believe, based on all available literature, evidence and current studies, that vaccines do not cause autism or other developmental disabilities. We firmly believe that thimerosal, a preservative that had been in vaccines for decades and now removed from all except some flu vaccine preparations, does not, and never did, cause autism or other developmental disabilities.
- We firmly believe that vaccinating children and young adults may be the single most important health-promoting intervention we perform as health care providers, and that you can perform as parents/caregivers. The recommended vaccines and their schedule given are the results of years and years of scientific study and data gathering on millions of children by thousands of our brightest scientists and physicians.

These things being said, we recognize that there has always been and will likely always be controversy surrounding vaccination. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin, persuaded by his brother, was opposed to smallpox vaccine until scientific data convinced him otherwise. Tragically, he had delayed inoculating his favorite son Franky, who contracted smallpox and died at the age of 4, leaving Ben with a lifetime of guilt and remorse, well described in his autobiography.

The vaccine campaign is truly a victim of its own success. It is precisely because vaccines are so effective at preventing illness that we are even discussing whether or not they should be given. Because of vaccines, many of you have never seen a child with polio, tetanus, whooping cough, bacterial meningitis or even chickenpox, or known a friend or family member whose child died of one of these diseases. Such success can make us complacent or even lazy about vaccinating. But such an attitude, if it becomes widespread, can only lead to tragic results.

Over the past several years, many people in Europe have chosen not to vaccinate their children with the MMR vaccine after publication of an unfounded suspicion (later retracted) that the vaccine caused autism. The result has been small outbreaks of measles and several deaths in Europe over the past several years.

Right here in Atlanta, those of us who trained in the 1980's, before the introduction of many of the vaccines now recommended, have seen first hand the horrors caused by these now preventable illnesses. For example, prior to the introduction of the Haemophilus influenzae type b vaccine (HIB) many infants and children contracted meningitis and either died, or live today with long term consequences such as developmental delay and deafness. We have HIB disease survivors in our practice. The germ still exists out there in many of our noses; however, infants today have a chance to be protected from seemingly innocent sneezes. The rate of HIB meningitis has declined rapidly and steadily due to the introduction and widespread use of the vaccine.

Furthermore, by not vaccinating your child you are taking unfair advantage of thousands of others who do vaccinate their children; associating with immunized children decreases the likelihood that your child will contract one of the diseases by reducing exposure.

We are making you aware of these facts not to scare you or coerce you, but to emphasize the importance of vaccinating your child. We know the majority of you agree with us, but also recognize that the choice may be a very emotional one for some parents. We will do everything we can to convince you that vaccinating according to the schedule is the right thing to do. However, should you have doubts, please come prepared at your next visit to discuss these with your health care provider. At times parents have requested to alter the vaccine schedule due to their concerns or reservations. Although we do not agree with this approach, we will allow you to sign a vaccine refusal/deferment form and work together to get your child immunized as soon as possible. Please be advised, however, that delaying or "breaking up the vaccines" to give one or two at a time over two or more visits goes against expert recommendations, can put your child at risk for serious illness (or even death) and goes against our medical advice as providers at Dekalb Pediatric Center. Such additional visits will be scheduled as available with our nursing staff and will require additional co-pays on your part.

Finally, if you should absolutely refuse to vaccinate your child despite all our efforts, we will ask you to sign a "Refusal to Vaccinate" acknowledgement form. Please recognize that by not vaccinating you are putting your child at unnecessary risk for life-threatening illness, disability, and even death. We hope you will reconsider on behalf of your child.

As medical professionals, we feel very strongly that vaccinating children on schedule with currently available vaccines is absolutely the right thing to do for all children and young adults. Attached is the recommended schedule and some web sites you may visit for additional information. Thank you for your time in reading this policy, and please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about vaccines with any of us.

Sincerely,

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