



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health – Women’s & Children’s Health Section

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MEMORANDUM

TO: UCVDP Providers

FROM: Beth Rowe-West, RN, BSN, Head
Immunization Branch

SUBJECT: Use of Alternative Vaccination Schedules

The purpose of this memo is to remind you of the program requirement that UCVDP providers promote and follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) childhood vaccine schedule in their practices. This requirement is specified in the Provider Agreement that UCVDP providers sign each year. The ACIP childhood vaccination schedule is the only schedule that is approved by the CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).

We recognize that the subject of alternative vaccination schedules has become somewhat controversial as a result of the amount of media attention given to the subject, particularly in the last year. However, when speaking with parents about childhood vaccines, the importance of following the ACIP schedule should always be emphasized, and this should be the official schedule used in your practice. If parents choose to have their child vaccinated following an alternative schedule, they should be fully informed of the risks to their child, as well as the fact that if their child is not in compliance with North Carolina Immunization law, the child cannot attend childcare or school. **A note from a physician stating that a child is not up to date on vaccinations because they are following an alternative vaccination schedule DOES NOT excuse or exempt children from the requirements of state immunization laws.**

Attached is a document containing questions and answers regarding the use of alternative vaccine schedules, as well as a link to an article recently published in the January 2009 edition of *Pediatrics* by vaccine expert Dr. Paul Offit, entitled “*What’s Wrong with Dr. Bob’s Alternative Schedule,*” which is a detailed critique of the Dr. Sears schedule. We encourage you to review these documents carefully, share them with your staff that discuss vaccines with parents, and retain them for future reference.

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Questions & Answers: Alternative Vaccination Schedules

Who develops the CDC/ACIP childhood vaccine schedule?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is made up of 15 members who are experts in infectious diseases and public health, and a consumer representative. In addition, there are ex-officio members from national and international medical, nursing, and pharmacist organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS), National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

What is the Dr. Sears schedule?

The Dr. Sears schedule is an alternative vaccination schedule created by Dr. Robert Sears, a pediatrician in California who promotes alternative medicine. Children vaccinated according to this schedule receive only two vaccines at a time, and it requires about 16 office visits by age 5 to complete this schedule. This schedule is based on Dr. Sears's personal opinions, not on science.

What's wrong with alternative vaccine schedules?

- ? They create missed opportunities and leave children vulnerable to vaccine preventable diseases, especially those in infancy.
- ? They do not follow ACIP guidelines which are developed by immunization experts, and based on science and evidence-based review.
- ? They do not adhere to North Carolina Immunization laws and rules.
- ? They require significantly more visits to the provider, thereby increasing healthcare costs.

Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine researcher and pediatric infectious disease specialist, recently wrote an article detailing the problems with the Dr. Sears schedule, which is the most frequently used alternative schedule. This article was published in the January 2009 *Pediatrics*, and can be accessed at:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/123/1/e164>

Can the NCIR be changed to make recommendations based on alternative vaccine schedules?

No. No alternative schedules of any kind will be included in NCIR. NCIR makes its recommendations solely on the scientifically based ACIP schedule and North Carolina immunization law.

Can I change my office's standard schedule to the Dr. Sears schedule or another alternative vaccine schedule?

The annual UCVDP provider agreement that you sign states that you will administer state supplied vaccines according to the ACIP schedule, which is parallel with our state immunization laws. Dr. Sears and other alternative vaccine schedules do not follow ACIP guidelines, are not endorsed by ACIP, and by following them, children may not be compliance with state immunization laws for North Carolina.

As a UCVDP provider, we expect you to support the use of the ACIP schedule, and to follow it routinely. If after educating a parent regarding the importance of following this schedule they insist on using an alternative vaccine schedule, you may continue to use state supplied vaccine to vaccinate the child. However, if you decide to adopt or promote any vaccine schedule for your office other than that of the ACIP you will need to privately purchase vaccines for your practice.

You also need to inform parents that if children are not up to date on their immunizations according to NC law, they cannot attend childcare or school. **A note from a physician indicating that a child is not in compliance with state immunization law because they are following an alternative vaccine schedule DOES NOT constitute an exemption from state immunization law.**

How should I document parental refusal to vaccinate according to the ACIP schedule?

Providers should always document when a parent refuses standard care for a child, including timely immunizations and document each time the issue is re-visited with the parent. AAP has a standard immunization refusal form that some providers choose to use in their practices. (Physicians should check with their legal advisor regarding the use of this form.) **Parents should be informed that signing the AAP refusal form or any type of waiver form DOES NOT excuse or exempt their child from the requirements of state immunization law.**

What resources are available to help me explain immunization risks and benefits to parents?

There are many excellent resources for information on discussing the importance of immunizations and vaccine safety to parents, particularly those who are hesitant to vaccinate.

American Academy of Pediatrics website:

http://www.eispimmunize.org/pro/pro_main.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/parents.htm>

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Vaccine Information Center:

<http://www.chop.edu/consumer/jsp/division/generic.jsp?id=75697>

National Network for Immunization Information (NNii)

<http://www.immunizationinfo.org/parents/index.cfm>