

Children's HEALTH

Connecting The Dots: What Parents Should Know About Chickenpox, But Don't

(NAPSA)—According to a recent survey, parents of children aged 4 through 12 were more reluctant to vaccinate their children against chickenpox compared to several other childhood diseases. The survey of more than 1,000 parents found that although 97 percent knew a chickenpox vaccine is available, only 64 percent had taken action to protect their child. The same parents reported vaccination rates of 90 percent or greater for other childhood diseases. The findings suggest that parents' misperceptions about the potential seriousness of chickenpox may be to blame.

"What we've learned is that in many cases parents are making the decision not to vaccinate based on misperceptions or misinformation. Many of these unvaccinated children between the ages of 4 and 12 may contract the disease later in life," said Tammy Tempfer, MSN, National Association for Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP). "Pediatric health experts, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and NAPNAP, agree that vaccination is the best way to protect against serious complications that may result from chickenpox."

The survey findings showed that many parents don't realize chickenpox can be a serious disease. For example, chickenpox can lead to



The CDC recommends vaccination against chickenpox as the best way to protect against the severe complications associated with the disease.

pneumonia, encephalitis, skin infections, scarring or even death. Many parents were unaware of these consequences. About a third of the non-vaccinating parents even think it's better for a child to catch the disease naturally than to get the vaccine. In fact, complications associated with the vaccine are extremely rare.

Another concern expressed by parents is that a child may still develop chickenpox after being vaccinated. Although this is possible, such cases are generally much milder. Some parents also thought that the vaccine would wear off over time. There is no clear evidence of waning immunity among people who have been vaccinated for chickenpox.

In addition, the survey findings revealed the importance of health care providers in parents' decision to vaccinate their children against chickenpox. Almost all parents (90 percent) chose to vaccinate their child if their health care provider recommended the vaccine. A majority of parents said their health care provider's recommendation was the primary reason they chose to vaccinate.

The CDC recommends that children be vaccinated against chickenpox after their first birthday. The chickenpox vaccine is not for everyone, however. For example, it is contraindicated in persons with a history of hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine, including gelatin. Parents should talk to their health care provider about whether vaccination is right for their child. As with any vaccine, the chickenpox vaccine does not result in a protective effect in all vaccines. Adverse reactions that have been reported with the use of the chickenpox vaccine include fever, injection site complaints and rash (injection site and generalized). For more information about the side effects associated with the vaccine, talk to your health care provider.

The survey was conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of NAPNAP and Merck & Co. Inc.