

Vaccination: Doing further research

If you are conducting research about vaccination, make sure the information sources you use are credible and backed by scientific research. This fact sheet provides tips about questions you should ask to sort out fact from fiction when researching vaccination.¹

Who produced the information?

The individuals or groups providing the information should be qualified to talk about vaccination. Beware of information attributed to unnamed 'noted researchers' or 'world-renowned scientists'. A researcher who has done good, solid work would insist that his or her name be attached to that work, even if it's controversial. Who stands behind the information? What educational background do they have? What other work have they published, and where? Think about the motives behind the claims: is it a tool for scare mongering or is it trying to sell something?

Is the information scientifically sound?

Medical researchers discover truth by testing their findings repeatedly to be sure that their thinking and methods are not flawed, influenced by their own assumptions, or marred by special circumstances. Studies should carefully weigh evidence based on fact and acknowledge any limitations.

- Studies should have a significant sample size (studies with hundreds of participants or cases bear more weight than descriptions of a single case). The most useful studies compare findings in one group of people with the findings in another group (control group).
- The findings should be able to be repeated by other researchers. If one conclusion is found in three studies, but a different conclusion is found in 30 studies, we can assume that the second conclusion is more likely to be correct. Be wary of people who proclaim that they, and only they, have discovered the 'hidden truth'.
- Studies should be endorsed by universities, professional associations or published in recognised peer-reviewed publications.

Is it fact or fantasy?

Claims should be based on fact, not fantasy. The hallmarks of 'junk science' are hasty and often sensational claims that other scientists have not seen, reviewed, or verified. Theories that mix fact and fantasy can be sensational but are not scientifically sound and often quote information out of context.

Be wary of claims that are too good to be true eg miracle cures. Just because the media give attention to certain claims do not necessarily mean they are true.

Recommended websites

Australian

- Queensland Government - www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/index.html
- Immunise Australia - www.immunise.health.gov.au
- Australian Childhood Immunisation Register - www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/services/acir/
- National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance - <http://www.ncirs.edu.au/immunisation/>

International

- UK National Health Service - <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/vaccinations/Pages/vaccination-saves-lives.aspx>
- Center for Disease Control & Prevention - www.cdc.gov/vaccines
- Immunization Action Coalition America - <http://www.vaccineinformation.org/>
- Immunisation Advisory Centre University of Auckland, New Zealand - <http://www.immune.org.nz/>
- American National Network for Immunization Information - www.immunizationinfo.org

To find out more about immunisation:

- visit www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/index.html
- visit www.immunise.health.gov.au
- talk to your doctor or immunisation provider
- call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

References

1. United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2010. 'Ten tips on evaluating immunization information on the Internet', [Online] Available at: www.hhs.gov/nvpo/tips.htm.