

A parent's guide to immunization information on the Internet

The Internet has a lot of information about vaccines and vaccine-preventable diseases—but there is also misinformation, and some of it can be harmful if used to make decisions about your child's health.

Evaluating immunization information on the Internet: What can I believe?

Asking a few key questions can help you decide if you can trust the information you find online. These questions can also help you evaluate other sources of vaccine information such as newspapers, magazines, radio, pamphlets or books.

1. Who runs the website? Can you trust them?

The website should:

- Clearly identify the person or organization that produced it and how to contact them. Look for an “About us” or “Contact us” link. It should give information about the owner and should be endorsed by a trustworthy health agency or professional organization. Experts should be identified, including their credentials (degrees, current positions, etc.).

2. What does the site say? Do the claims seem reasonable?

- Be cautious if the site makes unrealistic claims for what a product can do, or is selling something.

3. When was the information posted or reviewed? Is it up to date?

- There should be a date showing when the information was posted online and/or last revised. If yes, is it current?

4. Where did the information come from? Is it based on scientific research?

- The site should provide references to sources for evidence such as articles from trustworthy medical journals or texts, or include actual reports or statistics.
- Remember that not all “studies” or “reports” are necessarily reliable. The CPS has more detailed information on how to judge medical claims on the Internet.

5. Is the site listed by the World Health Organization as a trustworthy resource?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety has compiled a list of websites that provide information on vaccine safety and follow good information practices. This site (www.caringforkids.cps.ca) follows the recommended criteria and is on the list of trustworthy resources.

6. What are some signs that a website might not have a balanced point of view?

A number of studies have reviewed websites with anti-vaccine messages. These sites had many things in common:

- They made the same false claims about vaccines.
- They all had links to other anti-vaccine sites.

- Many promoted alternative therapies—such as homeopathy, naturopathy and chiropractic—as being better than vaccination for preventing infections.
- Many provided stories about children who had reportedly been hurt by vaccines.
- Parents—not people with medical training—were the main source for stories about the alleged dangers of vaccines.

It's a good idea to talk about the information you read on the Internet with your child's doctor or nurse before making any health decisions.

More information from the CPS:

- Vaccines: Common concerns
- Vaccines: Myths and facts
- Vaccine Safety
- A parent's guide to health information on the Internet

Additional resources:

- Immunization Information on the Internet: Can you trust what you read? (Immunize Canada)
 - CANImmunize Knowledge Centre
 - National Advisory Committee on Immunization
 - Public Health Agency of Canada
 - World Health Organization
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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Reviewed by the following CPS committees:

- Infectious Diseases and Immunization Committee
- Public Education Advisory Committee

Last Updated: **November 2015**

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The information on Caring for Kids should not be used as a substitute for medical care and advice. If you have specific concerns about your child's health, please see your child's paediatrician, family physician, or another health care provider.