

Parents' and caregivers' attitudes and behaviours towards child immunisation

Background

The Ministry of Health recommends and subsidises a comprehensive schedule of vaccinations to immunise children against communicable diseases (Ministry of Health, 2014). To understand attitudes and behaviours towards child immunisation, the Health Promotion Agency's (HPA's) Health and Lifestyles Survey (HLS) asks parents and caregivers a number of questions relating to the immunisation of a child in their care. This information can be used to help understand the barriers associated with child immunisation, and to develop effective health promotion strategies aimed at maximising immunisation rates.

Methodology

The HLS is a nationwide in-home survey conducted using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). Respondents in the 2014 HLS who were parents or caregivers of children aged 5 to 16 years were asked three questions relating to the immunisation of a child in their care.¹ Parents/caregivers were asked about their child's immunisation history, what concerns they might have about recommended vaccines, and what sources they use to obtain vaccine information for their child.

This fact sheet reports on responses to these questions and assesses whether responses changed according

¹ At the start of the survey interview, parents/caregivers were asked to answer a series of questions about a child in their care who was aged between 5 and 16 years. If there was more than one child aged 5 to 16 years living in the household, the child who had the next birthday was selected.

to child age, child ethnicity, neighbourhood deprivation, and parent/caregiver education level. It also assesses whether parent/caregiver-reported child immunisation rates have changed since the 2012 HLS. Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) are reported with associated odds ratios.

Parent/caregiver reports of child's immunisation history

All parents/caregivers were asked about the immunisation history of a child in their care. High rates of immunisation were reported: 92% (88-95%) reported that their child had received all recommended vaccines to date and 6% (4-9%) reported that their child had received some, but not all, recommended vaccines. A small percentage (1%; 0-3%) reported that their child had not received any recommended vaccines, and a further small percentage (1%; 0-1%) did not know their child's immunisation status. There were no differences between these parent/caregiver-reported child immunisation rates and those in the 2012 HLS.

Reported rates of complete immunisation (child had received all recommended vaccines for their age) varied by child age and ethnicity:

- Parents/caregivers of children aged between 13 and 16 years (84%; 76-92%) were less likely than those of children aged between 5 and 8 years (96%; 93-99%) to report that their child had received all recommended vaccines ($OR = 0.22$; 0.08-0.61).
- Parents/caregivers of Pacific children (97%; 95-100%) were more likely than those of European/Other children (91%; 87-95%) to report that their child had received all recommended vaccines ($OR = 3.55$; 1.24-10.17).

Parent/caregiver concerns about vaccines

All parents/caregivers (regardless of their child's immunisation status) were asked what concerns, if any, they might have about recommended vaccines. They could give multiple open-ended answers, which were subsequently back-coded into appropriate categories.

As in the 2012 HLS, most parents/caregivers (78%; 72-84%) did not have any concerns about recommended vaccines. Where concerns were reported, they were most commonly related to perceived side effects of vaccines (see Table 1).

Table 1. Proportion of parents/caregivers who reported particular concerns about recommended vaccines

Concern about recommended vaccines	%	95% CI
No concerns	78	[72, 84%]
Concerned about long-lasting side effects (eg, learning disabilities, asthma, diabetes, immune system problems)	8	[3, 13%]
Concerned about immediate side effects (eg, fever, rash, illness, allergic reaction)	6	[3, 9%]

Notes:

Respondents could give multiple responses

95% CI = 95% confidence interval

Only those concerns reported by at least 5% of parents/caregivers are reported

The proportion of parents/caregivers who had at least one concern about recommended vaccines varied by child age:

- Parents/caregivers of 13 to 16-year-old children (33%; 20-45%) were more likely than those of 5 to 8-year-old children (16%; 10-21%) to have at least one concern (*OR* = 2.58; 1.27-5.23).

Sources of information about vaccines

All parents/caregivers were asked what sources they have used to obtain vaccine information for their child. They could give multiple open-ended answers, which were subsequently back-coded into appropriate categories.

The most common source of information parents/caregivers used was healthcare providers (eg, doctors, GPs, practice nurses, paediatricians), followed by printed materials from healthcare providers (see Table 2). Healthcare providers were the primary source of information on vaccines regardless of child age, ethnicity, neighbourhood deprivation, and parent/caregiver education level.

Table 2. Proportion of parents/caregivers who used particular sources to obtain information about vaccines for their child

Source of information	%	95% CI
Healthcare providers	59	[50-68%]
Printed materials from healthcare provider	20	[8-33%]
None	19	[14-24]
Internet	13	[7-19]
Plunket	13	[6-20%]
Family/friends	7	[3-11%]

Notes:

Respondents could give multiple responses

95% CI = 95% confidence interval

Only those sources reported by at least 5% of parents/caregivers are reported

Key points

- The majority of parents/caregivers said that a child (aged 5 to 16 years) in their care had received all recommended vaccines.
- Parents/caregivers of younger children (compared to adolescents) and Pacific (compared to European/Other) children were more likely to report that their child had received all recommended vaccines.
- Parent/caregiver-reported rates of child immunisation did not change between 2012 and 2014.
- The majority of parents/caregivers had no concerns about recommended vaccines, although parents/caregivers of adolescents were more likely than parents/caregivers of younger children to have at least one concern.
- Where there were concerns about recommended vaccines, the most common concerns were related to perceived side effects (both short and long-term).
- Healthcare providers were the most common source of information parents/caregivers used to find out about vaccines for their child.

About the Health and Lifestyles Survey

- The HLS is a nationwide in-home face-to-face survey conducted every two years since 2008.
- The 2014 HLS asked New Zealand adults aged 15 years and over a series of questions about their behaviours and attitudes relating to tobacco, sun safety, healthy eating, gambling, alcohol, exercise, immunisation, mental health, and general health. The response rate was 73.2%.
- There were 742 parents and caregivers in the 2014 HLS, including 277 people of European/Other ethnicity, 218 Māori, 171 Pacific people, and 76 Asian people (prioritised ethnicity).
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) to ensure they are representative of the New Zealand population.
- For this analysis, proportions and 95% confidence intervals were produced. Odds ratios were undertaken to compare responses between groups. The significance level used for statistical analyses was set to $\alpha=0.05$.
- Comparison groups for these analyses were as follows:
 - Child age: 9 to 12 years and 13 to 16 years, compared to 5 to 8 years.
 - Child ethnicity: Māori, Pacific, and Asian, compared with European/Other (parent/caregiver ethnicity was not examined as child and parent/caregiver ethnicity were very similar).
 - Neighbourhood deprivation: New Zealand Deprivation Index 4 to 10, compared with New Zealand Deprivation Index 1 to 3.
 - Parent/caregiver education: No formal qualifications, School Certificate/NCEA level 1, and UE/NCEA levels 2 to 3/trade certificates, compared with university qualifications.
- A full description of the 2014 HLS methodology and further HLS publications can be found online at www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications.

References

Ministry of Health. (2014). *New Zealand Immunisation Schedule*. Retrieved from <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/immunisation/new-zealand-immunisation-schedule>

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About the HPA

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