

# Addressing Pediatric Vaccine Hesitancy: What Does the Evidence Say?

Partners  
in Protection

The challenge of navigating discussions of pediatric vaccination is a longstanding issue vital to the health of children globally. Fortunately, recent research supports the AIMS (Announce, Inquire, Mirror, and Secure) method as a conversational framework intended to increase receptivity in interactions with parents/guardians of children.<sup>1</sup>

We'll explore the AIMS method on the next page. But first, it's helpful to understand the categories that questions regarding vaccination generally fall into and the appropriate responses according to the CDC:



Common Questions	Recommended Responses
<b>About the vaccine schedule and the number of vaccines<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note that there's no evidence to support the claim that receiving multiple vaccines, even at one time, will overwhelm a healthy child's immune system<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Explain what antigens (ie, parts of germs) are and that there are fewer antigens in vaccines than in the child's natural environment<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
<b>If vaccines are more dangerous for children than the diseases they prevent<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share your personal experiences regarding how serious vaccine-preventable disease still impacts many patients, especially children<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Inform parents/guardians that children can still be impacted by diseases previously eliminated in the US carried by travelers and unvaccinated people<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Concerns about ingredients<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify that the ingredients that most commonly cause concern are vital to making vaccines safe and effective—for example, by preventing contamination<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Worries about side effects<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassure parents/guardians that most side effects are mild and go away within a few days, whereas serious side effects are very rare<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Highlight the fact that vaccines are not connected to increases in health problems such as asthma or autoimmune diseases<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Encourage parents to watch for possible side effects (eg, fussiness, low-grade fever, soreness where the shot was given) and provide information on how they should treat them and how to contact you if they observe something they are concerned about<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
<b>If vaccines are linked to autism<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how this misunderstanding is not supported by evidence and likely arose from the overlap between vaccination timelines and the age of autism onset<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When in doubt, discuss your personal experience vaccinating patients, having your children vaccinated, and/or being vaccinated yourself<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>

**Research has demonstrated that effective communication can improve patient health outcomes.<sup>1</sup>**

AIMS outlines a clear methodology to navigate these discussions with a focus on empathy for patients' concerns; **flip over for insight into this research-backed approach.**



# Employing the AIMS Method to Help Reduce Pediatric Vaccine Hesitancy

The evidence-based AIMS method provides a useful outline to structure discussion. It can help to nurture trust and foster productive conversations regarding vaccination.<sup>1</sup>



**Announce** that vaccination will happen and assume that people are ready to vaccinate.<sup>1</sup>

- Frame your approach as an assumption rather than a question to avoid communicating undue concern

“Now it’s time to give (the vaccine) to your child.”

**Pause** and allow the parent or guardian to respond and process. If they agree to immunize, proceed. If not, continue to the next step.

## Concern

“I’m not really sure that my child needs (the vaccine).”

**Inquire** and seek to understand the person by asking them about their concern(s).<sup>1</sup>

- Express interest in their level of hesitancy and what is driving their concern(s)
- Use active listening: focus on talking with them rather than at them
- Employ open-ended questions that can’t be answered with one-word responses—try starting questions with “How” or “What” instead of “Why”

“You sound like you’re undecided. How can I best help you make the choice to give your child (their vaccine) today?”

## Concern

“I’ve heard that (‘natural immunity’ is superior), so I don’t think my child needs (the vaccine).”

**Mirror** their perspective or concern(s).<sup>1</sup>

- Restate to demonstrate that you understand their point of view. Without validating the particular concern(s), you can express support for their right to raise questions

“Let me see if I understand what you’re saying: you don’t believe that (the vaccine) is effective?”

**Secure** their trust, regardless of their decisions about their child’s vaccinations.<sup>1</sup>

- It’s important to maintain a good relationship to facilitate future conversations, not only with you but also with other providers

“It’s great to see a parent so concerned about their children’s safety. What additional information can I provide to help with this decision?”

**Your relationships and responses to caregivers’ hesitations can help to determine whether their children will receive potentially life-saving vaccines.**

CDC=Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**References:** 1. Parrish-Sprowl J, Thomson A, Johnson RD, Parrish-Sprowl S. The AIMS approach: regulating receptivity in patient-provider vaccine conversations. *Front Public Health*. 2023;11:1120326. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2023.1120326 2. Questions parents may ask about vaccines. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. August 9, 2024. Accessed February 27, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-children/hcp/conversation-tips/questions-parents-may-ask.html> 3. Preventing and managing adverse reactions. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. July 25, 2024. Accessed April 16, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/imz-best-practices/preventing-managing-adverse-reactions.html> 4. Devitt M. Looking for tips on talking with parents about vaccines? *AAFP News*. April 12, 2019. Accessed March 24, 2025. <https://www.aafp.org/news/health-of-the-public/20190412vaccinetalk.html>

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