



# Branford Pediatrics = & Adolescent Medicine =

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## **Branford Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine Vaccine Policy Statement**

We, the providers at Branford Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, firmly believe in the effectiveness of vaccines to prevent serious illness and to save lives.

The World Health Organization estimates that vaccination saves the lives of more than 3 million people worldwide each year and prevents millions of others from suffering from diseases and permanent disabilities.

We strongly believe that all children and young adults should receive all of the recommended vaccines according to the schedule published by the Centers of Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

We believe, also, that vaccinating children and young adults may be the single most important health-promoting intervention we perform as health care providers and that parents/caregivers can perform for their children. Immunization is absolutely fundamental to what we do as Pediatricians. The recommended vaccines and their schedule of administration are the results of years and years of scientific study and data gathering. We are therefore disappointed and worried when parents refuse to immunize their children.

While no medical intervention is completely without risk and there are occasionally medical reasons not to administer a certain vaccine to an individual, by all measures, immunization is amazingly safe. By far, the most common vaccination related side effects we see are local swelling and discomfort at the vaccination site and modest fevers that resolve in one to two days. We firmly believe, based upon good medical investigations over many years, that vaccines do not cause autism or other developmental disabilities. We are happy to discuss the details of these studies or other vaccine side effects at any time.

The childhood vaccination program is truly a victim of its own success. It is precisely because vaccines are so effective at preventing illness that some parents are even considering not providing them for their children. Because of vaccines, many of you have never seen a child with polio, tetanus, whooping cough, bacterial meningitis, or even chickenpox, or have known a friend or family member whose child died of one of these diseases. The threat from these infections however, is still, all too real. Some of the older Pediatricians in our practice have seen young children die terrible deaths from types of bacterial meningitis which are now preventable by vaccines. Polio, which can cause lifelong paralysis, is still present in parts of the world and is, as we say, just a plane ride away. We have seen outbreaks of measles in this country and in Europe where a critical number of people have refused to provide their children with Measles, Mumps, Rubella vaccine. Measles, far from being a benign rash, can cause a dangerous brain inflammation and is responsible for the deaths of thousands of children around the world every year. Furthermore, by not vaccinating your child, you are reducing the effect of what in medicine we call "herd immunity". Essentially, this means that if vaccination rates fall below a certain level among a group of people we are more likely

to see certain diseases take root in a community. The illnesses can then spread to vulnerable people in whom a certain vaccination may not have taken hold, could not medically receive a certain vaccine, or who are not of the proper age to receive a vaccine. In this way, too, your unvaccinated child in our office and waiting room can be a danger to other children who may have weakened immune systems or are too young to receive the full course of vaccines.

We have been told by some parents that since most children are immunized, it is unlikely that their children will be exposed to vaccine preventable illnesses. In other words, they will not submit their own children to the even very small chance of a side effect to a recommended vaccine because they know that most other parents do immunize. We feel this attitude serves neither the individual nor the community.

We are making you aware of these facts not to scare you or coerce but to emphasize the importance of vaccination and how strongly we feel about it. We recognize that you have the right to make medical decisions on your child's behalf and that this is an emotional choice for some parents. There is a great deal of misinformation about vaccines on the internet and in other places. Again, the providers at our office are open to all discussions about your questions and doubts about the vaccination schedule. In some cases, we may alter the schedule or agree to defer or delay certain vaccines to accommodate parental concerns and reservations.

Finally, however, if you should absolutely refuse to vaccinate your child despite all our efforts, we will eventually ask you to find another health care provider who shares your views. We do not keep a list of such providers nor would we recommend any such physician. The timing of the practice asking you to find another source of health care for your child will come at the discretion of your provider and generally over the course of several visits.

The decision to ask parents who do not immunize to leave our practice has not come easily or lightly to us. As medical professionals, however, we feel very strongly that vaccinating children on schedule with the vaccines available to us is absolutely the right thing to do for all children and young adults. Thank you for your time in reading this policy and, again, we warmly invite discussion about your concerns and questions regarding vaccines or other aspects of your child's care.

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