



Branford Pediatrics

= & Adolescent Medicine =

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Branford Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine Vaccine Policy Statement

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.

Based on good evidence, children and young adults should receive all of the recommended vaccines according to the schedule published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics. The vaccine schedule is the result of intensive research by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). The ACIP has been active for 50 years.

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 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 or choose to use an alternative schedule.

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. Based upon good medical investigations over many years, we recognize that vaccines do not cause autism or other developmental disabilities. A reason that many people worry about vaccine safety is a 1998 study in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, which claimed a link between the MMR vaccine and autism. It is important to note that in February, 2010, *The Lancet* retracted the study as "false". The doctor who published the paper was not acting ethically and the research he presented was flawed. 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. Previous generations of pediatricians 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 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 an increasing amount of misinformation about vaccines on the internet and on social media. Again, the providers at our office are open to all discussions about your questions and doubts about the vaccination schedule.

Parents may want to use an alternative schedule to vaccinate their child. Unfortunately, alternative vaccine schedules use vaccines in a way in which they have not been studied, so they may not be as effective. Children vaccinated on alternative schedules tend to fall behind. They miss the vaccination windows set by the CDC, and sometimes are overdue for multiple doses of a vaccine. This makes the child more vulnerable to dangerous diseases that cause pneumonia, meningitis, and liver failure. Second, a “catch-up” vaccination series will need to be started. This requires multiple office visits in a short time frame with a higher-than-average number of shots per visit. It is time-consuming and painful.

One common concern parents have about the CDC vaccine schedule is that several vaccines are given at a visit. Some parents believe that children’s immune systems cannot handle multiple vaccines at once, and that they should be spread out among multiple visits. This is not the case. Children’s immune systems are constantly bombarded with bacteria and viruses. Their immune systems are designed to react and adapt to these threats, becoming stronger in the process. Vaccines take advantage of this adaptive ability. Spreading out vaccines only increases the number of visits and stress a child will have to endure. For example, 4 vaccines, given all at once, cause your baby to cry for 5 minutes or so. After giving comfort, they are well again. Giving 1 vaccine at 4 different visits causes your baby to cry for 5 minutes, 4 times. The overall stress response is higher. The association between doctor’s office and vaccines grows stronger with each vaccine visit, triggering fear and anxiety the moment the child comes through the door.

We have strengthened our practice policy on immunization--one upon which all our providers agree. If your choice is to refuse immunizations for your child or you choose to only accept an alternative schedule, we will ask you to move your child’s care to another health care provider that shares your views.

Establishing this policy is not taken lightly by us—our passion is working to keep your child safe and well. We would not choose to offer advice to our families that we would not offer to our own loved ones.

Received: Date _____ Name of Child/DOB _____

Signature: _____ Printed Name: _____