



Research Brief



Parental attitudes, concerns, and thoughts about the COVID-19 vaccine for 5- to 11-year-old children: Focus group findings from Worcester, MA

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Overview

Vaccine hesitancy is a long-standing public health issue that can result in low vaccination rates. This pattern is seen in the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine among children, as the vaccination rates are low. Low vaccination rates are concerning, as COVID-19 infection among 5- to 11-year-old children increases their risk of diabetes, other illnesses, hospitalization, and death. Exploring how parents view the COVID-19 vaccine is key to designing and implementing public health and clinical strategies to promote vaccination.

Main Questions

- What do parents think are the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine for their children?
- What concerns do parents have about this vaccine?
- Who do parents trust for information about this vaccine?

Study

This study recruited parents of 5- to 11-year-old children living in Worcester, Massachusetts, through trusted community partners to talk about the of COVID-19 vaccine for their children. Seven focus groups were conducted via Zoom with a total number of 67 parents, three in Spanish (n=37) and four in English (n=30). Focus groups were held pre- and post-FDA emergency use authorization (October 2021 - January 2022). Parents were asked their thoughts about 1) potential benefits of the vaccine, 2) concerns about the vaccine, 3) trusted sources of information, 4) impact of COVID-19.

The Bottom Line

Parents trust their child's healthcare provider as well as their friends and family. From these sources parents want to hear about personal vaccine decisions and experiences. Sharing these personal stories and messaging that highlights the many benefits of vaccination may help to motivate parents to vaccinate their children.

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Source

Goulding, M., Ryan, G. W., Minkah, P., Borg, A., Gonzalez, M., Medina, N., Suprenant, P., Rosal, M. C., & Lemon, S. C. (2022). Parental perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccine for 5- to 11-year-old children: Focus group findings from Worcester Massachusetts. *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics*, 0(0), 2120721.



Spotlight on Results

- Parent responses reflected their own attitudes and those of people they knew. Parents views on vaccination varied. Some were accepting while others were hesitant and resistant.
- Reasons for vaccination: 1) Peace of mind to protect themselves, family and community from COVID-19 illness transmission, severe disease, and death. 2) Social, emotional, educational reasons, such as not missing school, returning to 'normal' and reducing child anxiety.
- Concerns: Short-term and long-range side effects, changing recommendations, vaccine speed of development.
- Parents trust 1) healthcare providers (especially their child's provider) 2) their friends and families' experiences 3) their own experiences. They also want to know the vaccination decisions that their providers, friends and family make for their own children.

Call for Action

Clear communication is needed to combat vaccine hesitancy. Parents want to hear vaccine decisions form healthcare providers and friends.

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