

Combating 'Vaccine Hesitancy,' Northwest Health Initiative Reports Gains



By Erik Lief — April 14, 2017



A young child receiving a vaccination.
(photo courtesy: Shutterstock) [1]

In addressing anti-vaccination sentiment in the northwestern United States, several health organizations that have joined together are reporting progress in educating parents about the misinformation they are exposed to, as they promote the sizeable, sensible benefits of child vaccinations.

In a public-private effort called [Vax Northwest](#) [2], six groups – [Seattle Children's Hospital](#) [3], BestStart Washington, Washington State Department of Health, Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute, the Group Health Foundation and WithinReach – are taking part in an initiative called "Immunity Community."

The objective is to energize "parents who value vaccination to be advocates and to have positive conversations with other parents at their kids' childcare centers, preschools and schools -- in person and through social media," according to a recent [announcement](#) [4]. These engaged parents are known as "immunization advocates."

Another primary goal is to undermine "vaccine hesitancy," or skepticism among parents about the effectiveness and safety of immunizations. Results of a survey-based study conducted from 2011-2014 by Kaiser Permanente were [published this week](#) [5] in the journal *Health Promotion Practice*.

The two most prominent findings were that parents "concerned about other parents not vaccinating their children increased from 81.2% to 88.6%," the paper stated, and that those "reporting themselves as 'vaccine-hesitant' decreased from 22.6% to 14.0%."

"Strong negative rhetoric about vaccines can circulate widely on social media. And some parents feel hesitant about early childhood vaccines and may delay or refuse some or all vaccines, which may put others in their community at risk," said Clarissa Hsu, PhD, the study's principal investigator. "This project was designed to counterbalance prevalent anti-vaccine messages that do not reflect the fact that most (at least four in five) people vaccinate their kids and are supportive of vaccines."

Other results reported were that more parents believed it was a good idea to vaccinate their kids, and more were aware of the vaccination rates of the schools or daycare centers where their children frequented.

A limitation of the study was that it had no control group. Instead, the results were based on differences in survey data collected three years apart, prior to and after the "Immunity Community" initiative. Therefore, other factors, like cultural developments and amendments to state laws, may have played a role.

We here at the Council have been saying for years that vaccines are effective and safe, and that they confer benefits on those around individuals who are vaccinated, which is commonly known as "herd immunity." Led by the expertise of [leading physicians like Dr. Paul Offit](#) [6] we have advocated for vaccine use, while at the same time calling attention to fraudsters and know-nothings like the [disgraced anti-vaxxer Andrew Wakefield](#) [7]. Meanwhile, just two months ago, a Pew Research Center survey reported that [82 percent of Americans believe in the benefits](#) [8] of childhood vaccinations, which is in line with this recent survey.

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[2] <http://www.vaxnorthwest.org/about-vaccines--2/immunity-community--2>

[3] <http://www.seattlechildrens.org/safety-wellness/about-the-flu/flu-vaccinations-current-patients-families/>

[4] https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2017-04/kp-kps040717.php

[5] <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1524839917697303>

[6] <http://acsh.org/news/2016/10/07/debunking-vaccine-myths-dr-paul-offit-10269>

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[8] <http://acsh.org/news/2017/02/02/82-americans-support-childhood-vaccines-pew-survey-finds-10819>