

Understanding How Parents Make Decisions About Their Children's Vaccinations

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Abstract: Within public health a significant amount of research has been conducted to determine why parents make the vaccination decisions that they do. What is generally overlooked, however, is the process of how parents make these decisions—when they consider issues related to vaccination, what sources of information they consider, how they interpret the information from these sources, and so on. Based on a grounded theory analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with US-born parents living in King County, WA, this paper seeks to explain the processes of parents' decision-making about childhood vaccination and how these processes, in turn, translate into children's vaccination outcomes. The findings of this research suggest that decision-making about vaccination occurs along a continuum, ranging from complete accepting on one end to highly informed and involved decision-making on the other. While individual parents may occupy short or extended ranges along this continuum, four primary divisions or groups exist—parents who are complete acceptors; parents who rely on others for advice, information and/or opinions; parents who weigh the risks of vaccines and vaccine-preventable diseases for themselves; and parents who actively search for the Truth. Differences exist among these groups in terms of the factors that parents consider, the sources of information they consult, how they interpret or rely on those sources, the timing of their decisions, and ultimately the types of vaccination decisions that they make. These differences are important because of their potential to impact the success or failure of vaccination promotion efforts. It is therefore essential that they are considered by the public health community.