

## News Release

### Missouri State Medical Association

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#### Contact:

Liz Fleenor, Director, Communications/Managing Editor, Missouri Medicine  
[lfleenor@msma.org](mailto:lfleenor@msma.org)/573-636-5151

## **Are Parents Avoiding Vaccinations Because of Safety Fears? *Missouri Medicine* Addresses a Growing Concern**

**JANUARY 23, 2012** -- In November 2011 the American Academy of Pediatrics published the results of a national survey of parents of young children regarding their attitudes toward vaccination. It found that more than 1 in 10 parents surveyed currently use an alternative vaccination schedule and that a large proportion of parents that do use the recommended vaccination schedule have misgivings about it, and have considered switching to an alternative, less protective schedule.

So what is going on? Why is childhood vaccination, which has reduced illness and death by margins unimaginable a century ago, being rejected by so many parents? And how have physicians and public health professionals failed to make the case for immunization?

In their article, "I've Heard Some Things That Scare Me: Responding With Empathy to Parents' Fears of Vaccinations," published in the January/February 2012 issue of *Missouri Medicine, the Journal of the Missouri State Medical Association*, authors Kenneth Haller, MD, and Anthony Scalzo, MD, examine the science around vaccinations as well as the many messages that parents get from the media, from well intentioned but poorly informed anti-vaccine advocates, and even from doctors that can lead parents to be wary of immunizations for their own children.

Current fears of vaccination were galvanized by the 1998 publication of a paper in *The Lancet*, a medical journal in Britain, which proposed a causal relationship between the Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism in children. Subsequent investigations found unequivocally that the paper's lead author, Andrew Wakefield, had multiple conflicts of interest before and during his research, and had falsified some of the data. *The Lancet* disavowed and retracted the Wakefield paper, and he was barred from the practice of medicine in the United Kingdom. Despite that revelation, the anti-vaccine movement remains compelling to many parents because it exploits centuries-old fears of vaccination as well as the plight of families with children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. As vaccination rate against MMR have fallen serious illness and even deaths have increased from these preventable diseases.

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Since vaccination of children is both safe and effective, and there is no credible evidence of a connection between vaccination and autism, many physicians strive to reasonably lay out the scientific evidence for parents who worry about vaccinating their child. Yet they still find that many parents decline the vaccinations.

Drs. Haller and Scalzo propose that if physicians do not acknowledge and address the emotional basis of parental vaccine refusal, they will not be persuasive. While a fact-based explanation of vaccine safety is essential, physicians must recognize that they can and should use their experience and expertise to counter the fear-mongering of vaccine deniers.

**About the Authors:**

Kenneth Haller, MD, FAAP, MSMA member since 2004, is Associate Professor of Pediatrics. Anthony J. Scalzo, MD, FAAP, FACMT, FAACT, is Professor of Pediatrics, Director, Division of Toxicology [and Medical Director, Missouri Poison Center](#). Both are at Saint Louis University School of Medicine/SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center. Contact: hallerka@slu.edu

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**Resources:**

"Responding With Empathy to Parents' Fears of Vaccinations."

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"How the Case Against the MMR Vaccine Was Fixed"

British Medical Journal: January 5, 2011; 342;c5347

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_Wakefield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Wakefield)

American Academy of Pediatrics 2011 Immunization Schedules

<http://www2.aap.org/immunization/IZSchedule.html>

Vaccines and Diseases

<http://www2.aap.org/immunization/illnesses/illnesses.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/default.htm>

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

<http://health.mo.gov/living/wellness/immunizations/index.php>

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