

# Research-backed Strategies to Help Pediatricians Effectively Discuss Childhood Vaccines with Parents

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services conducted a statewide online survey to gauge parent perspectives, including in the American Indian community, on childhood vaccines in North Carolina in spring 2025.



## Key Findings

- 52% of parents fall into the persuadable category. These parents may delay, selectively vaccinate, or express uncertainty if vaccines are not mandated.
- 53% say their children are up to date on all vaccines.
- 56% would keep their children up to date even if vaccines were not required.
- Parents vaccinate to protect from illness, while those who delay or skip often cite concerns about side effects or risk vs. benefit.
- Medical professionals are the most trusted sources, but parents still want to be in control of the decision.

## What it Means for Providers

There are no shortcuts—building trust and motivating persuadable parents and families requires empathy, clarity and consistency. Begin each visit with vaccine information, listen without judgment and affirm the parent's role in making the best choice for their child.

## Effective Communications Strategies and Talking Points

### Begin every visit with clear communication.

- **Give your strong recommendation:** “At today’s visit, your child is due for some routine vaccinations that are recommended at this age.”
- **Tailor the discussion to the child’s age/schedule:** “At this age, your child is scheduled for [list vaccines]. These vaccines help protect against [list diseases]. We follow the schedule endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics based on the best available science.”

# Talking with Parents about Vaccines for Kids

## Respect parent's agency and respond to questions with empathy.

- **Acknowledge that it's okay to have questions:** "It's normal to have questions. I'm here to walk you through what each vaccine does and what to expect."
- **Connect your responses to parental goals:** "You're the expert on your child. My goal is to help you protect their health."
- **Acknowledge concerns without judgment:** "I hear that [insert issue or concern]. You're not alone. I hear that from other parents. As your pediatrician, we have a shared goal and that is to keep your child healthy. Let's talk through this together."
- **Address misinformation gently:** "There's a lot of confusing or inaccurate information out there. If you've come across something that made you unsure, let's talk about it."

## Speak to vaccine benefits.

- **Share why vaccines help protect health:** "Vaccines help your child build protection without having to get sick first. Vaccines are especially important to help protect babies, elders and people with weakened immune systems. They help strengthen the health of Tribal families and communities now and for future generations."
- **Explain the health risks of vaccine-preventable diseases:** "Vaccines protect your child from serious diseases like measles, whooping cough and meningitis. Some of these can lead to severe illness or death. Vaccines are the reason we don't see them as often anymore."
- **Highlight the purpose of each vaccine:** "These vaccines protect against serious diseases like measles, whooping cough and meningitis—illnesses that can spread easily and cause serious complications."
- **Highlight how vaccines have saved lives:** "Vaccines have reduced many diseases that killed or severely disabled people just a couple of generations ago. For instance, before vaccines, in the U.S. diphtheria was one of the most common causes of death in school-aged children and whooping cough killed 8,000 infants every year."

## Address safety concerns directly.

- **Reassure parents:** "We have decades of experience with these vaccines. Millions of children are safely vaccinated each year. Serious side effects are extremely rare."
- **Personalize based on your experience:** "I've given these vaccines to ## patients over the last ## years. I've never seen a serious adverse reaction in my patients."
- **Address common side effects gently:** "Most kids have no reaction or just mild symptoms like a sore arm or a low fever. That's actually a sign their immune system is learning to protect them."
- **Listen to Fears Related to Historical Mistrust:** Acknowledge the distrust and validate their and their community's lived experiences. Remind parents you want to have an open dialogue while helping answer questions and address concerns.

## Keep the door open.

- **Avoid sounding authoritarian:** Instead offer yourself as a source of real, reliable answers. End on a supportive, confident note that reassures continued care.
- **Offer reliable resources:** "Let me share some information from the American Academy of Pediatrics, which is made up of pediatricians and scientists who review the latest data each year to make sure the schedule is safe and effective."
- **Make a plan for next steps:** "I'm here to support you in making this decision. Let's schedule another appointment so you have time to read some of the resources I gave you, and we can continue talking."

For more information and other resources to help you talk with parents about childhood vaccines, visit [VaccinesForKids.nc.gov](https://VaccinesForKids.nc.gov).

