

3 Ways to Beat Vaccine Hesitancy and Boost Your Community's Health



As your pharmacy and patients jump headfirst into the school year and fast forward into flu season, it's a good time to recover from the ongoing controversy surrounding vaccinations and refocus on their benefits to the community.

It's no surprise that some patients and parents wonder whether they should avoid seasonal influenza (flu) shots or even entire schedules of pediatric vaccines. And the effects are hard to miss.

The U.S. in 2019 has seen 1,241 individual cases of the measles in 31 states. This is the highest number of measles cases seen in the U.S. since 1992, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The majority of these have been in unvaccinated people.

The measles is just one example of how vaccine controversy is often brought on by vaccine hesitancy. Vaccine hesitancy, also known by the World Health Organization (WHO), as "a delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccination services," is on the rise.

Whether vaccine hesitancy comes from risk perceptions (such as a belief that autism is caused by vaccines), misinformation and misunderstanding, religious or cultural beliefs, or simply a lack of access, it's important for your pharmacy to know how to manage it.

But how?

Historically, little information has been published to guide pharmacists in addressing vaccine hesitancy. And yet, pharmacists take center stage as health care providers. As a significant source of vaccinations in many states, pharmacists like you have an opportunity to communicate with patients and parents regarding the safety, efficacy, and public health value of vaccines. Here are 3 ways you can help reduce the burdens — and impact — of vaccine hesitancy.

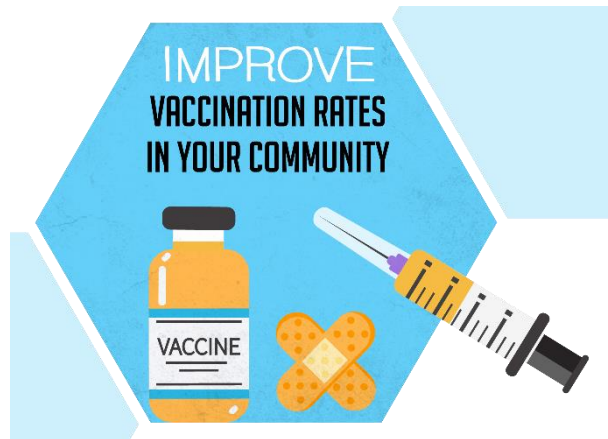
Get Resources to Address Vaccine Misinformation

The CDC and many other organizations provide pharmacists with updated information about vaccines. This information includes clinical recommendations, educational materials for patients, and information to help guide discussion of vaccines. You can access these resources online at the CDC, the Immunization Action Coalition and the American Pharmacists Association Immunization Center.

Knowing how to share clinical evidence related to vaccine recommendations is vital in addressing vaccine hesitancy on an individual patient level. All pharmacists should be prepared to confront a few very common myths, misconceptions, and misinformation campaigns.

Aim to Improve Vaccination Rates in Your Community

The most straightforward way to minimize the impact of vaccine avoidance is to work to improve vaccination rates by other means. This includes improving vaccine access and awareness for patients and their families. Offering vaccine services through your pharmacy can greatly improve access to vaccines, specifically flu, and can serve an important role for working families who may have difficulty making appointments during regular business hours.



Lead by Example

Pharmacists and other health care providers should remain aware of their own vaccination status and stay current with all recommended vaccinations. Not only does every vaccine help improve and safeguard the community's immunity but it helps set a healthy example for community members who may feel vaccine hesitancy.

As a pharmacist, you are a vaccine expert who can help debunk false claims about vaccines and address vaccine hesitancy on a case-by-case basis. Because pharmacists are one of the most accessible health care professionals in the U.S., patients may seek vaccine knowledge from you before their family doctors.

Final Thoughts

Be ready to have the vaccine conversation. We're here to help. Keystone is ready to provide insights and resources that will help your pharmacy become a more valuable partner to the community and fellow health care providers. We're dedicated to helping you maintain the health of your patients and communities and improve your pharmacy's bottom line.

If you're not a Keystone member yet, join us. If you are a member, make sure you're leveraging your benefits and maximizing your pharmacy's success. You can contact Keystone via email info@kpparx.com or by phone 215-464-9892.