**Survey: Most Parents Are Wary of Childhood Vaccines**

**BY FRANCIS CORREA**

More than three-quarters of surveyed parents said they were concerned about the safety and discomfort of childhood vaccines, with only 23% of respondents saying they had no concerns about childhood vaccination, according to a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Many of those concerns have arisen among parents because of a lack of experience with some of the diseases for which children are vaccinated. CDC researchers explained, as well as a misconception of the potential side effects of vaccines.

Most vaccine-preventable diseases, such as diphtheria and polio, are rarely seen in the United States, said Glen Nowak, one of the study’s main researchers and senior adviser for the CDC’s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (Health Aff. 2011;30:611-9).

For some vaccine-preventable diseases have been on the rise, Mr. Nowak said in an interview, including whooping cough and measles.

In the CDC study, parental concerns about vaccinating children included:

- Worries about the pain of receiving so many shots in a single visit to the doctor’s office (38% of respondents).
- Concerns that children receive too many vaccines in the first 2 years of life (34%).
- Fears that vaccines may cause fevers in children (32%).
- Concerns that vaccines may cause learning disabilities such as autism (30%).
- Concerns that vaccines’ ingredients are unsafe (26%).

The study was based on data from 2010 HealthStyles e-mail survey of parental vaccine behavior for 4,198 households nationwide.

The CDC study limited its analysis to the 476 respondents who reported having one or more children age 6 years or younger.

Parents who don’t vaccinate their children are taking a double risk, he added.

"One is that you’re taking the risk that your child won’t get that disease or that illness, and two is that if they get that disease or illness, that it won’t turn out to be a very severe case," Mr. Nowak said.

There is a lingering resistance to vaccines that sprang from a 1998 study that linked childhood vaccines and autism, said Mr. Nowak.

The study later was found to be fraudulent, and subsequent research has disproved such findings.

Nonetheless, nearly a third of survey respondents still said they were concerned that vaccines could cause learning disabilities such as autism.

Dr. Garry Gardner said that although nearly 90% of parents in his practice are comfortable with vaccines, vaccine confidence is still an issue.

"There’s still this persistent misconception about [childhood vaccines] and autism that just doesn’t seem to go away," noted Dr. Gardner, a pediatrician practicing in Darien, Ill.

He said once or twice a week he encounters parents who are reluctant to vaccinate their children and many of those parents still believe in the autism/vaccine connection.

Further resistance among a small percentage of his patients also comes from a general distrust in traditional medicine and the misconception that too many vaccines could adversely affect a child’s immune system.

More than half of the parents in the CDC study identified their physicians as their most trusted source of information.

However, 24% said that the Internet was one of their top three sources of childhood vaccination information.

The researchers cautioned that although hesitance about vaccination may not translate to refusal to vaccinate, parents should respect and address the concerns associated with childhood vaccination.