

How to respond to concerns about vaccination



How to use this document

Responding to vaccine safety concerns needs to be done in such a way that you do not drive people away, but win them over. This document presents a few tips on how to do this. Use them to prepare for your meeting with stakeholders or journalists who may have concerns about immunization safety.



How was this document developed?

This document is part of a WHO series of supporting documents concerning events that could erode confidence in vaccination. Such events can be related to vaccine safety, adverse events following immunization, changes in the vaccination programme, negative public debate, outbreaks or pandemics.

All documents were developed based on scientific evidence, laboratory research and fieldwork within psychology, social and behavioural science and communication and lessons learnt in countries. For an introduction to the theoretical background and evidence, refer to the WHO publication *Vaccination and trust*, available here: www.euro.who.int/vaccinetrust.

The supporting documents are intended for use by national

- ministries of health
- centers for disease control
- immunization programmes
- regulatory authority institutions.



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The decision-maker will seek to make rational decisions, weighing benefits against risks.

Even if his or her concern may be based on myths or lack of knowledge, do not talk down to or lecture him or her. Also, do not interpret questions as a lack of respect for you.

→ Acknowledge his or her concerns and appreciate that it is not easy to gauge the vast amount of sometimes conflicting information on immunization.

→ Be honest, also about the risks and safety issues that do pertain to immunization.

→ Make sure you know your data well, so that you are able to respond to different concerns.

→ Be aware that too much science may frustrate the decision-maker, too little may as well – so assess who you are talking to and adjust accordingly.

To do this successfully, you can use the so-called CASE approach:¹

C	A	S	E
CORROBORATE	ABOUT ME	SCIENCE	EXPLAIN
Acknowledge their concerns.	Describe from where you obtain your knowledge.	Present the facts (know the data well).	Explain your recommendations based on facts.

A simplified example: Concerns about multiple antigens

C	A	S	E
CORROBORATE	ABOUT ME	SCIENCE	EXPLAIN
"It is true that with the introduction of new vaccines, children do get more vaccines than they did just a few years ago."	"My advice is based on WHO's recommendations."	"There is no evidence that vaccines overload the immune system. Children are exposed to numerous bacteria and viruses every day. Bacterial infections of the throat and tonsils bring exposure to about 25-50 antigens."	"Spreading out vaccinations leave babies unprotected for a longer time. Fewer health facility visits limits discomfort for the child and inconvenience for the caregiver, and thus increases the prospects of the child completing the vaccination schedule on time."

A simplified example: Concerns about vaccines causing autism

C	A	S	E
CORROBORATE	ABOUT ME	SCIENCE	EXPLAIN
"I certainly understand that you ask about this, considering the many stories that are circulating about this topic."	"I am convinced by the conclusions from a long range of studies made – none of which have found a link."	"There is no evidence of a link between measles vaccine or MMR and autism. A 1998 study by Andrew Wakefield on this issue was later found to be seriously flawed, and Wakefield was found guilty of serious professional misconduct."	"Not vaccinating children will not protect them against autism, but it will put them at risk of serious diseases."

¹ Jacobson RM1, Van Etta L, Bahta L. The C.A.S.E. approach: guidance for talking to vaccine-hesitant parents. Minn Med. 2013 Apr;96(4):49-50.