



PARENTS PACK

MONTHLY UPDATES ABOUT
VACCINES ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

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GETTING ACCURATE INFORMATION IN AN AGE OF MISINFORMATION

Do you have questions about vaccines?

Do you have conversations with others that leave you questioning what you thought you knew about vaccines?

Do you find yourself wondering if vaccine information you are seeing online is accurate?

Vaccines have always incurred questions — and for some, deeply held suspicions. But our path for getting answers used to be more straightforward. Well ... in reality, it wasn't as much straightforward as it was limited. Information simply was not as freely available to all. And, while some might be tempted to wring our hands about the current information environment, more people having access to more information is, in fact, a good thing. But more information and access means more care when consuming that information.

More information requires more care.

Historically, we got most of our information from sources that were vetted in some way — media bound to abide by certain standards, books published by established and well-reputed publication companies, healthcare providers and other professionals we most often had long-standing relationships with, and a close circle of family members and friends. As a result, we often didn't question the quality of the information we received. While even in those scenarios, information was not always accurate, generally speaking, we could trust the information that we were using to make important decisions, such as about healthcare.

These historical assumptions about the quality of information we are receiving do not serve us well in our new information environment because the sources of today's information are much less restricted. Said another way, they may not have been vetted in any way that makes what is being proffered credible. Anyone can produce information and disseminate it with little or no actual experience in or knowledge about the topic at hand. And, while a particular message might come to you from someone you know and trust — or even from a professional-sounding group or a well-known influencer, celebrity or politician, the real question is where did that message originate? Who first disseminated it? What was their motive? Were they held to any ethical and quality standards? With what credentials are they making the statements?

Although we are inherently skeptical creatures, we have not had to constantly think about the quality of information we were gathering, so in many cases we still don't. However, to successfully navigate today's information environment, we need to intentionally work to close the gap between increased access to information and evaluation of that information. Unfortunately, while people are generating this habit and learning the necessary skills to do so, others are taking advantage of the gap. They have figured out how to keep us from focusing our inherent skepticism in the right places. They do this by:

- Disseminating messages that overpower our emotions, making us angry and outraged, so that we don't think logically about the message before internalizing it and sharing it.
- “Checking enough of the boxes” to make themselves sound like experts on the matter, so we don't think we need to question the information they are sharing.
- Repeating the same unfounded claims enough times, often from several seemingly different sources, that people believe it must be true, so they don't feel a need to look more closely at the issue.

These are only a few examples of the tactics being used to keep people from honing their information evaluation skills, but if we are aware of them, we can short-circuit their success in spreading falsehoods.

The Vaccine Education Center (VEC) has compiled a variety of resources offered by many groups to help with evaluating information. We hope you will check them out to see which ones are useful to you.

continued >

Now, back to vaccines ...

We started this article talking about vaccine questions and some of the scenarios that may leave you wondering about the accuracy of what you are seeing or hearing, and as described in the last section, a healthy skepticism is a good place to start, but we would be remiss if we stopped there.

Because vaccines have been, and continue to be, a topic that generates emotion and a large share of misinformation, we wanted to provide some reliable sources of vaccine-related information. We hope that when you are seeking answers, you check with sources that we know are offering sound information. Because each group is a bit different, you may find that you like the style, approach, or content focus of some groups over others. Conversely, you may find that you get different types of information by checking with several of the groups. Whatever you decide, at least you can start with the knowledge that these groups have been vetted by healthcare professionals and scientists who were themselves skeptical. After they critically assessed each group, these were found to provide accurate information.

Check out the “Vaccine Websites” page today.

For more information, you can also check these lists of resources:

- Vaccine Books
- Vaccine Safety References

In sum

People who create communication resources know that one resource will not work for everyone because people have different information needs and bring different experiences to their assessment of information. So, while our temptation would be to offer a few tips for evaluating information or a handful of websites as having all the answers, we realize that would not be the most helpful approach. As this article illustrates, seeking quality information takes time, effort and practice. We hope the resources included here give you a good start regarding where to look. However, if you are seeking specific information that you can't find, please feel free to contact us, so we can help.

Check out the QR codes below for links to the resources in this article.

**RESOURCES FOR
EVALUATING
INFORMATION**



**VACCINE
WEBSITES**



**VACCINE
BOOKS**



**SAFETY
REFERENCES**

