

Protecting Our Children

Protecting Our Community

Evaluating Immunization Information on the Internet: Ten Tips

1. The ownership of the site should be clear.

Is the name of the organization or individual posting the information in clear view? Look for highlighted text that tells you more about the author of the site.

2. The information provided should be based on sound scientific study.

Scientists arrive at their results by testing their findings repeatedly and thoroughly, to be sure that their thinking and methods are not flawed. Studies with hundreds of participants or cases are more reliable sources of information than descriptions of a single case. The most useful studies compare findings in one group of people with the findings in another group (control group). Findings should be endorsed by groups or institutions dedicated to science, such as professional organizations or universities.

3. The individuals or group providing the information should be qualified to address the subject matter.

Beware of information attributed to unnamed “noted researchers” or “world renowned scientists.” A researcher who has done good, solid work would insist that his or her name be attached to that work, even if it’s controversial. Who stands behind the information? What educational background do they have that relates to the health topic area? What other work have they published and where?

4. The site should carefully weigh the evidence and acknowledge the limitations of the work.

The scientific approach takes time, and often answers are slow in coming or don’t come at all, which can be frustrating. Good researchers, however, aren’t afraid to address the weaknesses and the strengths of their findings, to say that the findings were inconclusive, or to say that additional research is needed. If three studies come to one conclusion, but thirty studies come to a different conclusion, which one is more likely to point to the truth? Be wary of people who claim they are the only ones to have discovered the “hidden truth.”

5. Does the site contains references from recognized peer-reviewed publications?

One sign of a scientifically sound internet site is that it has references from publications in the field. Good, sound research is always reviewed by the author’s peers—people who share the same profession and are scientifically trained—before it’s published (even on the internet).



6. Beware of dubious science and suggestions of conspiracies.

The hallmarks of dubious science are hasty, and often sensational, claims that other scientists have not seen, reviewed or verified. Media attention does not necessarily mean a claim is true. Conspiracy theories often offer a quick and exciting answer to a puzzle, but are not borne out in the long run.

7. Arguments should be based on facts, not conjecture.

Be careful about sites that mix fact with fantasy, without distinguishing between the two and without offering evidence that has been verified in multiple studies. As with dubious science, the resulting theories can be sensational but are not scientifically sound.

8. The motives of the site should be clear.

Is the site a sales and promotional device? There is nothing wrong with selling books or tapes, or enlisting you in a cause, but motives should be clear.

9. The information provided should make sense.

Is it too good to be true? Or too awful to be true? Then it most likely isn't true. Can you find this same information elsewhere? Is it backed up by research?

10. You should be able to obtain additional information if you need it.

Is an email, postal address, or telephone number provided for further information? Is a reading list or source list given? Is the reading available through a public library, or is the list a source of income for the site owner?

Other sources of information:

The internet can be a wonderful source of information...and it can also be a terrible source. Evaluate what you find using the above ten tips. For more information about immunizations, call:

- ★ **Nevada County Department of Public Health: 265-1450**
- ★ **Miners Family Clinic: 265-7890**
- ★ **Sierra Family Medical Clinic: 292-3478**
- ★ **First 5 Nevada County: 265-0611**

Material adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control, National Vaccine Program Office: <http://www.hhs.gov/nvpo/tips.htm>