Ten ways to separate vaccine fact from fiction

Not sure what information you can trust? This checklist can help.

Routine vaccines help prevent many harmful diseases like measles, flu, and cancers from human papillomavirus (HPV). These diseases can have serious, and sometimes permanent, consequences. But, by following the routine vaccine schedule, you can give your child the best possible protection.[1] You can protect them before they are exposed to a disease and when their immune system will work best with the vaccine.[2,3,4] Most U.S. adults agree that childhood vaccines are important, but not all children have all the vaccines they need.[5,6] Ask your child's doctor or nurse whether your child is up to date. And be sure to share this checklist with friends to help them separate vaccine fact from fiction.

1. Check the source. Examples of trustworthy sources are the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and your state or local health department. The "about us" page on a website or the "about" section of a social media profile are ways to check the source.

2. Confirm whether a social media account is real. Some accounts impersonate public figures or organizations to spread misinformation. Check the "about" section to see the account description. If it's an organization, then check whether the description matches the organization's website. A social media account may be fake if it is missing information or does not match the website.

3. See whether the author or person quoted in the article or the person sharing the information online is an expert on the subject. Search for their name online to learn about their background. And check to see whether they have a health degree, like MD, PhD, RN, or MPH, which can help indicate that they're an expert.

4. Look at the purpose of the information. Is the author trying to inform or educate you? Or are they selling or promoting something? Are they trying to get you to agree with them? If the purpose of the information seems suspicious, then look for another source.

5. Consider how the information makes you feel. Does it make you angry? Frightened? Surprised? Like you want to share it right away? Some untrustworthy sources try to make you feel this way. It's smart to question information like this and to check out the website or person providing it.

6. Check the date to be sure the information is current. Information that's old may not be correct.

7. See whether the information cites other trustworthy sources. Information that includes links to or quotes from other trustworthy sources is more likely to be correct if the quotes are not taken out of context.

8. Look for warning labels on social media posts. Companies like Facebook and Instagram sometimes put warning labels on posts that may have false information.

9. Double-check the information. The first results in an online search aren't always the most reliable. And "news" shared on social media may not be true. See whether you can find the same information from a trustworthy source like CDC, FDA, or your state or local public health department.

10. Still not sure? When in doubt, ask your child's doctor or nurse. They are experts you can trust. For information from a credible vaccine source, visit LetsGetRealAboutVaccines.org.

[1]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-children/schedules/reasons-to-follow.html

[2]Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: https://www.chop.edu/news/health-tip/why-its-important-to-be-up-to-date-on-vaccines

[3]CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-children/about/

[4]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/who-and-when/infants-to-teens/index.html

[5]Gallup News: https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/648311/240807Vaccines.pdf

[6]CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7245a2.htm

LetsGetRealAboutVaccines.org

Scan this QR code to find more tools and resources.