

## Could Parental Vaccine Hesitancy in Childhood Immunization Programs Increase After COVID-19 Vaccines?

### COVID-19 Aşılarından Sonra Çocukluk Çağı Bağışıklama Programlarında Ebeveynlerin Aşı Tereddütleri Artabilir mi?

Mehmet Semih DEMİRTAŞ<sup>1,2</sup> 

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, Aksaray University, Aksaray, Türkiye.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Social Pediatrics, Institute of Health Sciences, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye.

Corresponding Author: Mehmet Semih Demirtaş, Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, Aksaray University, Aksaray, Türkiye.  
e-mail: md.semihdemirtas@gmail.com

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Dear Editor,

This article evaluates the vaccine hesitancy among parents, which was also highlighted in the article titled “Covid-19 Vaccine Acceptance Among Parents: Are They Willing to Vaccinate Their Children?”, which was published in your journal and was our starting point.<sup>1</sup> Vaccine hesitancy, defined as the postponement or refusal of vaccination despite the possibility of vaccination, differs from vaccine refusal, which is not vaccination at all. Vaccine hesitancy has become a focus of increasing concern due to its potential to lead to delays in vaccination, vaccine refusals and to jeopardize the public health outcomes of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks.<sup>2,3</sup> Vaccine hesitancy is an important issue affecting public health that can be influenced by many factors such as confidence, social media interaction and convenience. Given that vaccine hesitancy is often specific to certain subgroups and not generalized across populations, it is important to understand which groups are hesitant to vaccinate, what their concerns are, which of a variety of possible reasons may be contributing to their hesitancy, and where the people who are hesitant are located, i.e. the geographical, sociocultural or political microenvironment that may lead to hesitancy.<sup>1,2</sup> The anti-vaccination movement and the vaccine hesitancy that is being spread throughout society started almost as soon as vaccination

itself. While these movements can have a beneficial effect on developing and publicizing the safety of vaccines, they can also have a negative impact on parents.<sup>4</sup>

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected vaccine undecideds, especially the discussions on mRNA vaccines and vaccines developed rapidly due to the emergency situation. These debates and inaccurate information have increased the ambivalence of parents towards the childhood immunisation program, and this seems to be a situation that will interrupt the childhood vaccination program. With the decrease in childhood immunizations, diseases such as measles, tetanus and polio will appear and spread. Therefore, necessary precautions need to be taken. In this context physicians, especially pediatricians, have an important role to play in ensuring that parents understand the importance of vaccination and vaccine-preventable diseases. In addition to being the most important determinant of vaccine acceptance, the advice given by physicians to families also plays a role in eliminating vaccine hesitancy.<sup>3,5,6</sup>

Health professionals in the field of child health should promote immunization, and to do this effectively, they should devote sufficient time to each family and provide infor-

mation based on scientific data on questions and hesitations about vaccination. This information should be presented in a way that recognizes that the main concern of families is the health and safety of the child. Vaccine hesitancy should be taken seriously, not only by pediatricians and other health professionals, but also by governments and health policy makers. Governments, relevant public institutions and NGOs need to take an active role in informing the public about childhood immunization, and in setting/implementing policies to reduce and prevent risks associated with vaccine hesitancy. Removing false and inaccurate information about vaccination from social media and the internet can be achieved through collaboration between governments, the technology sector, health professionals and civil society organizations.<sup>4,7</sup>

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