

Text Messages to Debunk Vaccine Misinformation

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All pediatricians spend a fair amount of time talking about vaccines, as it is an important part of what we do at most well child visits. There is so much vaccine misinformation out there. I am always looking for strategies to debunk vaccine misinformation.

Thus, my eyes were drawn to an article being early released this week in *Pediatrics* by Dr. Maryke Steffens and colleagues at 5 Australian universities, entitled "Addressing Myths and Vaccine Hesitancy: A Randomized Trial" ([10.1542/peds.2020-049304](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-049304)).

In this study, the authors used text messages about vaccines to try to debunk vaccine myths.

They randomized 454 parents of 0- to 5-year-olds to receive 4 different types of messages:

1. Myth: the vaccine myth was repeated (e.g., Vaccines overwhelm a baby's immune system), followed by a message that corrected the myth,
2. Question: the vaccine myth was questioned (e.g., Can vaccines overwhelm a baby's immune system?), followed by a message that corrected the myth,
3. Statement: the correct statement was made (e.g, "A baby's immune system is able to respond to a vaccine and fight germs at the same time), and
4. Control: a message about parenting strategies unrelated to vaccines was provided.

In particular, the authors wanted to know if the Myth strategy worked, since some studies have suggested that restating the myth may inadvertently reinforce the myth.

The good news is that the Myth strategy did not reinforce vaccine myths. The other good news is that the Question strategy was associated with increased disagreement with vaccine myths, immediately after the text message was sent. The bad news is that none of the debunking strategies were associated with increased intention to vaccinate.

Take a look at this article. Are there strategies that you can take from this article and use in your own practice when you provide vaccine information, either verbal or written, to parents?

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