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VACCINE REFUSAL POLICY

Prevention of childhood illness is at the heart of a Pediatrician's mission, and we are extremely proud of the progress made in primary prevention of serious infectious diseases through the use of immunizations. Prior to the development of effective vaccines, infants and small children were particularly susceptible to life threatening infections from viruses such as polio, measles and varicella. Bacteria such as diphtheria, pertussis, Haemophilus Influenza B, and Strep pneumococcus caused severe meningitis, blood infections, as well as respiratory and skin infections. Children who survived often suffered serious morbidity. For that reason, the physicians of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine strongly encourage parents to follow the recommended immunization schedule.

We understand a parent's concerns that vaccines may have side effects, and in years past have allowed parents to follow a modified vaccine schedule. This was based on the hope that missed vaccines would not put the child at risk because of "herd immunity"- immunity that occurs when most of the community is vaccinated, thereby limiting the spread of a particular disease to those not immunized. As increasing numbers of parents are choosing not to immunize their children, herd immunity is being lost. Illnesses that haven't been seen for years are returning -noted by the number of infants that **died** this year in the pertussis outbreak in California.

Vaccinations protect infants and children from contagious diseases that threaten them. We feel so strongly about this, that we have come to the difficult decision to exclude from our practice families that choose not to vaccinate their children completely. The presence of an unvaccinated child in our office exposes children who are too young to receive their vaccines, or children who are unable to receive vaccines for medical reasons such as allergies, immunosuppression or chemotherapy, at risk. Altered vaccine schedules put a child at risk of contracting a preventable disease that may no longer be susceptible to conventional therapy.

For families who choose to immunize on an alternative schedule, we will work with you as long as the schedule allows the child to be fully immunized by the age of two years. We still encourage the recommended schedule, and are always available to answer questions.

An alternative schedule requires more visits to the office to complete the schedule. Due to our contracts with the insurance carriers, we are **required** to collect a co-pay for **each** office visit, even if it is just for a vaccination.

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