

Watchung Pediatrics Vaccine Policy

At Watchung Pediatrics, we pride ourselves on providing comprehensive, compassionate, and state-of-the-art quality care to our patients in the communities that we are proud to serve. We truly believe that vaccinating children and teens to prevent them from acquiring life-threatening diseases is one of the most important services that we offer to our patients. Simply put, vaccines save lives.

Caregivers may feel that the decision to immunize their child is a personal one and they should not be required to immunize. However, the decision not to immunize affects not just the health of an individual child, but the health and well-being of other children and adults. All decisions have risks and benefits associated with them. The decision not to immunize a child requires parents to accept the risk that their child, or others, could suffer the crippling or deadly effects of a vaccine-preventable disease. As health care providers, we know based on the medical data that the benefits of immunizing children and adolescents far outweighs any perceived or unproven risks of harm. Vaccines produced today are safer and more effective than they have ever been. There is very solid, reliable medical evidence that vaccines do not cause Autism or any other developmental disabilities. Vaccines also don't contain any harmful toxins.

Some caregivers may also feel that polio, tetanus, whooping cough, meningitis, measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella are rare diseases that their child is unlikely to come in contact with, so they are "safe" in declining vaccinations. However, vaccination programs only work well when as many people as possible in a community are immunized. This is called "herd immunity," and it protects children and adults who are unable to receive the vaccines because they are too young, too old, or have weakened immune systems. In order for herd immunity to work effectively, 90% of people in a community must be vaccinated. Because of the refusal and delay in giving life-saving vaccines to children, herd immunity in our country has dipped dangerously below 90%, putting everyone at risk of illness or death.

Because we feel that Watchung Pediatrics has an important responsibility to protect our families and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases, we can't accept the risk that unimmunized or under-immunized children or teens pose to other children and their families in our practice and in our communities. Therefore, we have revised our Watchung Pediatrics vaccine policy based on the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). This is consistent with what many other pediatric practices across the country are doing

because of the recent return of deadly vaccine-preventable diseases. By enforcing its vaccine policy, Watchung Pediatrics does not discriminate against any religion or group. Furthermore, there are no religions that prohibit the vaccination of children and teens.

We want to assure you that it is completely fine to give multiple or combination vaccines at the same office visit. This is because the reactivity of the individual vaccines is a tiny fraction of what a child's immune system would be faced with if it were exposed to the actual diseases. Because we understand that despite the medical evidence and our assurances, some caregivers may still be skeptical about giving multiple vaccines at an office visit, we do try to accommodate our few families who want to give less than the recommended vaccines per visit. However, to be clear, this concession has no medical benefit whatsoever and delaying vaccines dangerously affects the herd immunity and puts children, adolescents, and adults at an increased risk of illness. In addition, separating the vaccines into multiple visits causes unnecessary additional pain to children and teens. In addition, Watchung Pediatrics will accept delays of vaccine administration only if they are within the "window" period of the AAP & CDC recommendations.

Our policy states:

- We strongly recommend utilizing the immunization schedule as is recommended and determined by the AAP and CDC.
- All children must receive all vaccines recommended by the AAP that are mandated for school entry by the State of NJ.
- All children must begin receiving vaccines by age 2 months.
- If a caregiver elects to give less than the recommended number of vaccines at a visit, the child must return to the office at 1-2-week intervals to stay within the recommended "window" for the vaccines. A follow up vaccine only appointment should be made when leaving the office after a child's checkup.
- All parents who do not follow the exact AAP vaccine guidelines must sign a waiver that they are utilizing an alternate vaccine schedule, approved by a physician or nurse practitioner and completed at the time of the visit.
- In order to make the alternate schedule clear to providers, staff and caregivers, and to minimize vaccine administration errors, providers will

enter “refused vaccine” into a patient’s EHR immunization record if they didn’t get the recommended vaccines on that day.

- If a patient misses a “vaccine only” appointment, a receptionist from Watchung Pediatrics will call to reschedule the appointment. Caregivers who are following an alternate vaccine schedule who do not adhere to their agreement and who don’t have a medical reason for their child missing the vaccine appointment will be given a warning, and their child’s provider will be notified of the missed appointment. If a caregiver fails to keep a 2nd vaccine appointment, the patient will be discharged from the practice.
- Caretakers who do not agree with the Watchung Pediatrics vaccine policy and do not plan on immunizing their children within the time frame specified will be given a 1-month grace period to find another pediatric practice.

Watchung Pediatrics has a few additional guidelines for some specific vaccines:

- The Hep B series must be completed by the time of school entry.
- The Influenza vaccine is strongly recommended for all children and teens age 18 or younger. It is not mandatory except for children in a state-registered daycare or preschool.
- The Gardasil vaccine is an anti-cancer, three-dose vaccine series which is strongly recommended for older children and teens. Research shows that it is most effective when given during the preteen/early teen years (11-13).