



## TEN TIPS ON EVALUATING IMMUNISATION INFORMATION



**How do you know if vaccine information you find on the internet or in other sources is accurate?**

**Today's media capabilities and the internet are wonderful tools for making information widely and rapidly available, but they also make readily available information that is not reviewed for scientific accuracy.**

**1. *The ownership of the site should be clear:*** Is the name of the organisation or individual posting the information in clear view? Look for highlighted text that tells you more about the author of the site. In some programs, the ownership can be found by clicking "View" and then "Document Source" or "Document Information."

**2. *The information provided should be based on sound scientific study:*** Scientists discover truth by testing their findings repeatedly, to be sure that their thinking and methods are not flawed, influenced by their own assumptions, or marred by special circumstances. Studies with hundreds of participants or cases bear more weight than descriptions of a single case. The most useful studies compare the findings in one group of people or cases with the findings in another group (control groups). A mark of sound scientific study is that the findings are endorsed by groups or institutions dedicated to science, such as professional associations or universities.

**3. *The site should carefully weigh the evidence and acknowledge the limitations of the work:*** Think - What does the weight of the evidence indicate? If conclusion #1 is found in three studies, but conclusion #2 is found in 30 studies, which is more likely to point to truth? Be wary of people who proclaim that they, and only they, have discovered the "hidden truth." The scientific approach takes time, and often, answers are slow in coming or don't come at all. This can be very frustrating if the answers will have an impact on our--or our children's--health and well-being. Solid researchers, however, are not afraid to address the weaknesses as well as the strengths of their findings, to say that the findings were inconclusive, or to say that additional research is needed before any conclusions can be drawn. A scientifically sound web site will reflect these circumstances.

**4. *Beware of "junk science" and suggestions of "conspiracies.":*** The hallmarks of junk science are hasty, and often sensational, claims that other scientists have not seen, reviewed, or verified. Media attention does not necessarily mean a claim is true. "Conspiracy" theories often offer a quick and exciting answer to a puzzle. Think: If I take apart the pieces of "evidence," do they really fit together again?

**5. *The individuals or group providing the information should be qualified to address the subject matter:*** Beware of information attributed to unnamed "noted researchers" or "world-renowned scientists." A researcher who has done good, solid work would insist that his or her name be attached to that work, even if it's controversial. Who stands behind the information? What educational background do they have that relates to the health topic area? What other work have they published, and where?



**6: Arguments should be based on facts, not conjecture:** Beware of sites that mix fact with fantasy, without distinguishing between the two. As with junk science, the resulting "theories" can be sensational but are not scientifically sound.

**7. The motives of the site should be clear: Is the site a sales and promotional device?** There is nothing wrong with selling books and tapes, or enlisting you in a cause, but motives should be clear.

**8: The information provided should make sense: Is it too good to be true?** ("Rub peanut butter on your knees and you'll never have cancer!") Or too awful to be true? ("Millions die when injected with vaccines!") Then it probably isn't true.

**9. One sign of a scientifically sound Internet site is that it contains references from and to recognized peer-reviewed publications.**

**10. You should be able to obtain additional information if you need it.**

Is an e-mail or postal address, or a telephone number, provided for further information? Is a reading list or source list provided? Is the reading available through a public library, or is the list a source of income for the site owner?

If government documents or publications are referenced, remember that they are usually available free or at low cost through the government publishing services.

*(Source: The US Department of Health & Human Services at [www.hhs.gov/nvpo/tips.htm](http://www.hhs.gov/nvpo/tips.htm), accessed 9 June 2010)*



## USEFUL WEBSITES

---

### Immunise Australia: [www.immunise.health.gov.au/](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/)

The Immunise Australia Program aims to increase national immunisation rates by funding free vaccination programs, administering the Australian Childhood Immunisation register and communicating information about immunisation to the general public and health professionals.

### Information Line – 1800 671 311

### Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR): [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/services/acir/index.jsp](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/services/acir/index.jsp)

The Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (the Immunisation Register) is a national register administered by Medicare Australia that records details of vaccinations given to children under seven years of age who live in Australia.

### Brisbane City Council: [www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:BASE::pc=PC\\_895](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:BASE::pc=PC_895)

Provides information on immunisation and offers immunisation clinics for children and adults.

### National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance (NCIRS): [www.ncirs.edu.au/](http://www.ncirs.edu.au/)

NCIRS aims to inform policy and planning for immunisation services in Australia and to support initiatives in the surveillance of vaccine preventable diseases, including disease surveillance, vaccine coverage and immunisation adverse events.

The Centre also conducts an extensive program of clinical trials and epidemiologic research funded by diverse sources. NCIRS brings together a group of experts and postgraduate students in public health, paediatrics, internal medicine, infectious diseases, epidemiology and laboratory and behavioural sciences.

Resources for the public: [www.ncirs.edu.au/immunisation/index.php](http://www.ncirs.edu.au/immunisation/index.php)

[www.vaccination.org.au](http://www.vaccination.org.au) is a collaborative website between Northern Rivers General Practice Network and the North Coast Area Health Service in NSW and provides accurate information, based on scientific evidence on immunisation, information on infectious diseases and the vaccines that provide protection against them. In understanding the diseases, the immune system and how vaccines work from science based information, parents can make an informed decision about immunisation.

### The Immunisation Advisory Centre (IMAC): [www.immune.org.nz/?t=563](http://www.immune.org.nz/?t=563)

A website based in New Zealand at the School of Population Health at The University of Auckland. Their aim is to provide New Zealanders with a local source of independent, factual information including benefits and risks regarding immunisation, and vaccine-preventable disease. The information provided is based on international and New Zealand medical research and is supported by a large network of health professionals. The information and some resources can still be used by Australian healthcare consumers.



**The UK National Health Service (NHS): [www.nhs.uk/Planners/vaccinations/Pages/Landing.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Planners/vaccinations/Pages/Landing.aspx)**

This NHS-accredited information answers many questions about vaccinations and how they protect your health.

**US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/)**

The CDC is the US-based organisation dedicated to protecting health and promoting quality of life through the prevention and control of disease, injury, and disability.

**Immunization Action Coalition: [www.immunize.org/](http://www.immunize.org/)**

An American website that is most suited for health professionals, but many aspects of it will be informative for parents. For example, it includes sections that summarize the effects of vaccine-preventable diseases, including personal accounts of people who have been affected by them. Also runs the following website:

**Vaccine Information: [www.vaccineinformation.org/](http://www.vaccineinformation.org/)**

Provides comprehensive information about a specific disease and the vaccine that prevents it. Each page includes a Q & A section, photos and/or video footage, true stories of individuals who have suffered or died from the disease, descriptions of public policies, and references to other resources.

**National Network for Immunization Information (NNii): [www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)**

An American web site designed to provide health care professionals, the media, policy makers, and the public with up-to-date, science-based information on immunizations. The site features a searchable database of information on diseases prevented through immunization. It also includes background on vaccine development and vaccine safety, guidelines for how to evaluate health information on the Internet, and an image gallery of the effects of vaccine-preventable diseases.