



Joshua Coleman, MD • Aaron Hanna, MD • Josh Lane, MD •
George Lazari, MD • Barbara Leverett, MD • Jennifer Massey, MD
Jennifer Mote, MD • Clark Newton, MD • Matthew Threadgill, MD

1245 Augusta West Pkwy • Augusta, GA 30909

Immunization Policy

The physicians of APA are all in agreement that childhood immunizations are one of the greatest medical blessings our children have, and represent one of the greatest achievements of Western medicine.

The following discussion outlines our beliefs and may answer some common questions about vaccines. We are more than happy to discuss this with you at any point.

Vaccines are safe and effective. They are important for your children, and we want to help you to keep them healthy by protecting them from vaccine preventable diseases. The United States has the very best medical care in the world. Not long ago in the U.S., we saw many of the devastating and often fatal diseases that are no longer seen because of immunizations. Polio used to be rampant. Measles often killed. H. flu meningitis (a bacterial meningitis) was a common occurrence. Deafness resulted from rubella. Today in underdeveloped countries these diseases still exist, and children still die or have life altering consequences from them.

In the early years of vaccine development, parents who had seen the devastating effects of these diseases were eager to protect their children by getting them vaccinated. Ironically, the very success of the vaccine program has unfortunately caused some parents to believe that these immunizations are not necessary. The current generation of parents has no knowledge or experience with the devastating illnesses that have thankfully, for the most part, become very rare in the US. This leads some to the conclusion that since the diseases are not seen often now, preventive vaccination is not needed. However, the diseases are still with us, and if a large number of children are not immunized, we will see increasing numbers of our children becoming ill with vaccine preventable illnesses. This has come to light recently with the current measles outbreak. The US has seen more cases of measles in 2019 than in decades. This highly contagious and severe illness is continuing to spread and the vast majority of children falling ill are unvaccinated.

Some parents have questions concerning necessity and safety of vaccines. Much of the current vaccine hesitancy has roots in a study published in the Lancet in 1998 in which Andrew Wakefield claimed a possible link between MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine and autism. This seemed to open a door for other claims and concerns about vaccines, even when there wasn't scientific evidence to support those claims. All of these issues have been studied many times in great detail with large numbers of children and no link has been found between vaccines and the potential negative effects claimed. Social media has taken these claims to a whole new level with people posting information that has not been evaluated through the rigors of science. While some of these stories are compelling and seem believable, as physicians, we rely on science and scientific studies in all of our practice of medicine. Vaccines are no different. The risk/benefit ratio is overwhelmingly weighted in favor of immunizing. We would not offer and recommend these vaccines otherwise. We are confident that your child will be protected safely as we administer these immunizations.

Our recommendation to immunize represents some of the best, scientifically sound, advice that we can give. You should expect the highest level of care from us and this care should always be based on the blessing of having advanced scientific research and knowledge available. You bring your children to us for counsel, advice, and treatment; we, in turn, are committed to doing the best for your child that we can, honestly,

scientifically, and medically. Our relationship is built on mutual trust and confidence. If you cannot trust us in this area, it is likely that you will not trust us in other areas; thus, the physician-patient bond is broken.

Due to these strongly held beliefs of the safety of vaccines and the desire to protect your children--our patients--from these devastating illnesses, our physicians are all in absolute agreement that vaccines are a necessary part of each child's medical care.

For the following reasons, our practice strongly recommends timely immunizations:

1. For your child's health, immunizations are essential.
2. For the public good, immunizations are essential. Pockets of children that are not immunized are often detrimental to the health of the community. There are always individuals who are not immune to illnesses-possibly due to age-being too young to receive a vaccine, illnesses such as cancer/chemotherapy or other issues. Vaccinating is extremely important for the public health of the whole community.
3. When one of our doctors is on call, it is impossible for him or her to know who is immunized and who is not. An unimmunized child is at higher risk for serious diseases and may impact our ability to make an informed, wise medical decision. Having unimmunized patients in our practice compromises the care we want to give; it is not fair to your child, to other children in our practice, or to the doctor.

We are very willing to discuss immunizations with you. However, we are firmly convinced that childhood vaccines are both safe and effective. There is no medical reason to deviate from the established vaccine schedule, to delay immunizations or break up vaccines; multiple vaccines given at the same time are safe. If you choose to break up the immunizations, be aware that this goes against our medical advice and puts your child at risk for serious and possibly life threatening disease. Also, each additional visit required to break up or space out vaccines will require a \$25 office administration fee. In addition, please realize that we will ask you to sign a refusal to vaccinate form in the event of vaccine refusals.

We do not desire to lose any of our patients, but if our stance does not fit your views, and if, after discussion about your concerns, there is still refusal to vaccinate your children, we will regretfully ask you to find another physician.

Thank you for taking the time to read this policy.