VACCINE HESITANCY REBUTTALS:
Strategies to Address Vaccine Hesitancy and Misinformation with Parents and Caregivers

When discussing childhood vaccines with parents, you may encounter hesitancy or resistance. It is important to address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation during these conversations by sharing additional information to encourage caregivers to vaccinate their children. As you communicate with parents, try to use 'fact-focused', positive language rather than restating misconceptions or myths as this may reinforce them. We provide several examples of what this can look like.

General Recommendations:

- Use clear, easy-to-understand, language during these conversations
- Use non-judgmental language
- Use motivational interviewing strategies to engage in conversation
- Practice reflective listening
- Be empathetic

Motivational interviewing is a style of communication that sits somewhere between listening and giving information or advice. It is a tool designed to empower people by drawing out their own motivations and capacity for change through a series of questions or prompts.

Myths and misinformation you may hear from vaccine-hesitant parents/caregivers	You might reply with...
"Vaccines aren't safe." *"Vaccines contain toxins and ingredients that are dangerous."* *"Vaccines can cause autism and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)."*	• As a parent, I know you want what's best for your child. Vaccines are an important tool we use to make sure children grow up to be happy, healthy, and strong. • Vaccines protect children from serious diseases, including measles, mumps, rubella, polio, and whooping cough. These diseases can cause serious complications and even death. • Vaccines are a safe and effective way to prevent these diseases, and they have been tested to ensure that they are safe and effective for children of all ages. Every vaccine undergoes extensive testing before being licensed, and vaccine safety continues to be monitored as long as a vaccine is in use.

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Myths and misinformation you may hear from vaccine-hesitant parents/caregivers	You might reply with...
"It is better if my child catches the disease and builds their immunity that way." *"Vaccines can infect my child with the disease it's trying to prevent."*	• Vaccines are the best way to protect your child from getting seriously sick from diseases. • Just like wearing a seat belt reduces your chances of being injured in a car accident, vaccines reduce the chance that a virus will cause serious health issues or death even if you are exposed. • If your child is exposed to a virus, they may experience serious or life-threatening health effects, and immunity may not last very long. Getting vaccinated is a much safer way for your child to build immunity against serious diseases.

"Vaccines can cause long term side effects, illness and even death."
 	
"The side effects from the vaccine are worse than the disease itself."
	• Like any other medication we take, vaccines can have some potential side effects. However, the side effects are usually mild and will typically go away on their own after a few hours or days.
	• Some common side effects may include:
	  • Pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site
	  • Fever
	  • Mild rash
	  • Tiredness and irritability
	• Your child's doctor or a pharmacist may keep an eye on your child for 15 minutes after giving a vaccine, just to make sure they do not have a serious reaction (e.g., an allergy).

"If everyone around me is immune, then my child doesn't need to be vaccinated."	• Getting children vaccinated protects them and the people around them, including older adults, people who might have existing health issues, and others who may be more likely to end up in the hospital if they get sick. Children that are vaccinated are less likely to pass on an illness to someone else. • However, if enough people choose not to get vaccinated, that means serious diseases—like measles or polio—can spread, even to people that have been vaccinated.
"Children don't get COVID." *"My child is healthy and will not get seriously ill if they get COVID."* *"If my child already had COVID, they don't need to be vaccinated."* *"My child can still catch COVID even if they're vaccinated, so what's the point?"*	• Like adults, children are susceptible to COVID and can experience serious symptoms and long-term health problems, including death. This includes healthy children. • Even if your child catches COVID, the vaccine reduces their risk of serious outcomes, hospitalization, and the risk of developing long-term health problems (which can develop even after a mild illness). • It's important to stay up to date by getting the most recent booster for COVID, as those protect against the most common strains circulating now.

Myths and misinformation you may hear from vaccine-hesitant parents/caregivers	You might reply with...
"Vaccines are expensive" or "I can't afford to get my child vaccinated."	• If you have health insurance, your child's vaccines are covered by insurance plans. There may be a small co-payment or co-insurance for some doctor's visits.. • If you do not have insurance, all Santa Clara County community clinics offer free or low-cost routine vaccinations for children. Contact the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department for more information.
"Giving more than one vaccine at a time increases the risk of dangerous side effects or can overload a child's immune system."	• Giving several vaccines at once has no negative effect on a child's immune system. • In fact, administering vaccines together can save time and money through fewer visits to your doctor and reduce discomfort for a child through fewer injections.

Additional Resources

You can refer caregivers you work with to the following resources depending on their needs:

- Healthychildren.org provides information on immunizations for parents, from the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov/vaccines) provides lists of recommended vaccines by age.
- VaccineInformation.org provides timely, accurate, and factual information about vaccines and the diseases they prevent.
- VaccinateYourFamily.org provides information about vaccines for parents, pregnant women, adults, healthcare providers, and vaccine advocates.
- Find a Clinic in Santa Clara County that will offer free or low-cost vaccines.