



Letter to the Editor

Vaccine Hesitancy and Its Consequences

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Dear Editor;

Routine vaccination of children was one of the greatest achievements in the field of health in the 20th century,¹ which has significantly reduced infectious diseases and maintained public health by creating widespread vaccination coverage.² More than 99% of Iranian children are covered by vaccination programs.³ However, the significant increase in the phenomenon of “vaccine hesitancy” and in some cases, complete refusal to vaccinate, is an important and serious threat to the success of vaccination programs and public health.⁴ Numerous reports from around the world, including Iran, show significant concerns about the safety, effectiveness, and side effects of vaccines, which have led to a decrease in public trust and an increase in parental hesitation.^{1,5} These hesitations range from superficial doubts to complete refusal to vaccinate.⁶ According to estimates, approximately 25% of children aged 19 to 35 months have not been vaccinated for reasons related to parental hesitation.⁷ Also, global statistics show that vaccination coverage has decreased from 86% to 81% from 2019 to 2021.⁸ For example, in Croatia, about 10.6% of parents refuse to vaccinate their children, and the hesitancy rate is about 19.5%. In the US state of North Carolina, the vaccine refusal rate is reported to be between 12% and 13%.⁹ In Malaysia, about 11.6% of parents are hesitant, and concerns reach 40% about possible side effects of vaccines, and 37.4% about their safety and effectiveness.¹⁰ According to the Iranian Ministry of Health, vaccination coverage has also decreased below 95%.⁸

This trend has greatly increased the risk of the return of infectious diseases that were previously expected to be eradicated, as demonstrated by the resurgence of diseases such as measles in Europe.¹¹ In 2022, a similar example of the reemergence of some diseases such as measles was observed in Isfahan.⁸ Given the importance of maintaining “herd immunity” and decreasing vaccination coverage, this situation has become a global concern and the World Health Organization has declared it one of the serious threats to public health. The roots of this problem go back

to multiple factors, including insufficient knowledge, cultural beliefs, previous negative experiences, effects of social networks, and health policies.^{12,13} Therefore, health professionals have a vital role to play in gaining the trust of families by providing accurate and reliable information, and policymakers must also design targeted programs to educate, address public concerns, and increase access to vaccines.

The following actions are recommended to be prioritized to effectively address this challenge:

- Developing ongoing and comprehensive education programs about the importance and safety of vaccination
- Actively combating misinformation and negative propaganda in cyberspace
- Facilitating access to vaccination services for all
- Continuing research and publishing reliable reports on the effectiveness and side effects of vaccines.

Ultimately, without a concerted effort to dispel doubts and increase vaccination coverage, major health advances will be jeopardized, and the health of children and society will be at risk.

Authors' Contribution

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