

# Research Rx

Department of Evaluation and Research Services

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## Defining the Problem of Immunizing Children Who Strongly Resist Needle Injection

### Background

Literature from the fields of psychology, nursing, pharmacology, medicine, and dentistry reveals fear of needles as one of children's greatest fears, with claims that up to 93% of some groups of children and as many as 10% of adults experience serious immunization-associated stress. Clearly, nurses can expect to encounter both children who are frightened and resistant to needles as well as parents or caregivers who are also fearful.

Despite this evidence, little is known about what the experience of immunizing frightened and needle-resistant children can be like for nurses. The purpose of the study was to explore nurses' experiences of immunizing children who are frightened of needles, and to consider approaches that are helpful in decreasing nurse stress.

35 public health nurses from five different health units within Fraser Health attended focus groups and discussed the question:

"Sometimes children who present for immunization strongly resist needle injection. Based on your experience, what is it about this situation that is a problem for you?"

### Results

Four main themes emerged:

- 1) Nurses experience stress when immunizing children who fear and resist needle injection
- 2) The strength of child resistance and some adult behavior creates an ethical dilemma for nurses
- 3) Some adult responses make immunizing difficult and unsafe
- 4) Resources to help nurses cope with these situations are inconsistent



### Spotlight on...

#### Supportive Health Policy based on:

- Experiences of caregivers
- Planning preventive strategies to optimize good patient outcomes
- Making improvements in care delivery

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## Impact for FH

- Mary Ives' research has been published in 2 nursing journals (*Model empathy and respect when immunizing children who fear needles – The Canadian Nurse, 2007; Immunizing Children Who Fear and Resist Needles: Is it a Problem for Nurses? - Nursing Forum, 2010*) and she has presented at 3 conferences: (The 8th Canadian Immunization conference 2008, Toronto; The Community Health Nursing Association of Canada Conference June 2009, Calgary; and a BCCDC Forum on Immunization in Schools, 2008, Vancouver BC).
- Further research in this area could lead to more consistent support for nurses responsible for immunizing children and to more consistent best practice and positive outcomes for all (i.e. a least restraint policy).
- Most recently, representatives from the Prince Albert Parkland health region in Saskatchewan requested permission to use the article (Immunizing Children Who Fear and Resist Needles: Is it a Problem for Nurses?) as a basis for policy development.

### Contact Us:

Susan Chunick,  
Director  
604-587-4681

Dina Shafey,  
Ethics Coordinator  
604-587-4436

Camille Viray,  
Administrative Assistant  
604-587-4628

Magdalena Swanson  
Research & Grant  
Development Facilitator  
604-587-4637

Michael Wasdell,  
Epidemiologist  
604-587-4438

Susann Camus,  
Knowledge Integration  
Specialist  
604-587-4412

Matthew Querée,  
Knowledge Integration  
Specialist  
604-587-4413

### How Do I Learn More?

- A parent information brochure has been developed for use throughout Fraser Health and can be viewed at: <http://immunizingchildren.wordpress.com> or ordered from the print shop (#256111)
- Content specific to this issue has been added to the BCCDC immunization manual (Sect. IV, p.20-21) available online at: [http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D8264FFC-445B-439E-A3E7-763374383206/0/SectionIV\\_AdministrationofBiologicalProducts\\_Jan05.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D8264FFC-445B-439E-A3E7-763374383206/0/SectionIV_AdministrationofBiologicalProducts_Jan05.pdf)



**FH Principal Investigator:** Mary Ives, RN, BSN, MHS, CCFE, Chilliwack Health Unit

**Co-investigator:** Sherri Melrose, RN, PhD, Assistant Professor, Centre for Nursing and Health Studies, Athabasca University

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