Countering Vaccine Myths

Many parents and caregivers are subject to misinformation and disinformation about vaccines through social media, websites, and online influencers. It is becoming increasingly important for healthcare professionals to be able to counter (debunk) vaccine "myths" when talking to parents and caregivers.

Debunking Myths

1. Myth: "It's too many shots at once"

a. A child's immune system has the capacity to respond to multiple vaccines at once
b. Immune responses to multiple vaccines are similar to vaccines given individually
c. The current vaccine schedule has more vaccines but fewer antigens

2. Myth: "My child doesn't need this vaccine because this disease is mostly gone"

a. Current outbreaks of measles demonstrate that diseases we thought were gone can return
b. High vaccination rates are the key to maintaining herd immunity and preventing the resurgence of diseases such as rubella and poliomyelitis

3. Myth: "Vaccines might cause autism"

a. Studies suggesting a link between vaccines and autism have been discredited
b. No studies have confirmed a link between autism and vaccines
c. Increases in autism diagnosis are likely because of changing diagnostic criteria
d. Temporal association is not the same as causal association

4. Myth: "Vaccines are not safe"

a. Vaccines are held to a higher safety standard than other medical interventions because they are given to healthy individuals
b. Vaccines have extensive safety and monitoring programs to ensure safety

5. Myth: "Healthy teenagers do not need the meningococcal vaccine"

a. Although rare, meningitis is very contagious and often deadly, even for otherwise healthy adolescents and young adults
b. Adolescents in the 16- to 20-year-old age group have an increased risk for meningitis
c. This is because of behaviors and environmental risk factors, such as socializing in large groups

"Prebunking Myths"

In addition to *debunking* common vaccine myths, you can also try *prebunking:* teaching patients about misinformation and disinformation in advance.

Tactic: Fear Amplification	Tactic: Fake Experts
Prebunking: "Some posts try to scare parents by focusing on extremely rare events and ignoring how common and dangerous the diseases are"	**Prebunking:** "You often see someone posting presented as an 'expert' when they actually don't have any education or background in pediatrics or immunization"
Tactic: False Balance	**Tactic: Conspiracy Framing**
Prebunking: "You often see debates that look like experts are split 50-50, when in fact the evidence is overwhelmingly on one side"	**Prebunking:** "Some posts make you feel like there is a hidden agenda, which can make the evidence feel untrustworthy"