

# Examining the link between vaccine refusal and those who use alternative medicines

November 24 2017

---



Credit: University of Western Australia

A new study led by a researcher from The University of Western Australia has analysed the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) by parents who reject some or all vaccines for their children.

The study drew on data from interviews conducted with 29 [parents](#) in Fremantle and Adelaide as part of two separate studies. Dr Katie Attwell, Senior Lecturer from UWA's School of Social Science, said the study was the first in Australia and one of the first internationally to look at the reasoning informing [vaccine](#) rejection and CAM use.

"There are studies that do show a correlation between vaccine rejection

and CAM use but none so far that have specifically examined the reasons behind it. This study is one of the first of its kind and it's produced some very interesting findings," Dr Attwell said.

Dr Attwell said the study showed that parents had a range of attitudes, but also some distinct patterns, that led to their engagement with CAM.

"We found a [symbiotic relationship](#). CAM use doesn't cause vaccine refusal, or vice versa, but there is a definite link between the two," she said.

"If you're a CAM user, you may feel like you don't need to vaccinate and your CAM provider may support this view. And if you're a vaccine refuser, you may rely upon CAM as part of your toolbox to pursue a healthy life for your family and not see vaccinations as a necessity."

Dr Attwell said the study found the vaccine refusers were a cohort of parents who really valued autonomy, choice and action.

"We didn't just look at parents visiting CAM practitioners, but also their use of remedies at home, and their network of friends that may also support their home remedies. Doing things for themselves is important – it's a DIY ethic and it seems to empower them in both their use of CAM and their decision to reject the medical consensus on vaccinating."

Dr Attwell said a subset of the parents in the study, mostly those who accepted some vaccines, were sceptical of the use of some or all CAM.

"Others think their family is so healthy that they don't need CAM or vaccines. And while many of our parents were sceptical of pharmaceutical companies, only a handful were concerned that CAM also operates for profit. So there were some really interesting nuances within our data, as well as an overall explanation for why vaccine refusal

and CAM use travel together."

Dr Attwell said the study could inform how vaccination policymakers and health professionals discuss vaccination with parents who value natural products and their own input into child health.

"Emphasising the immune-boosting capacities of vaccines through the natural responses they elicit in the body is one option," Dr Attwell said.

"However, it's even more important to consider that CAM means something to vaccine refusing parents, who feel like it works for them. Discussing how vaccinating supports their existing parenting practices is important if you want to engage with them."

The study has been published in the *Social Science and Medicine* journal.

**More information:** Katie Attwell et al. "Do-it-yourself": Vaccine rejection and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), *Social Science & Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.11.022](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.11.022)

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: Examining the link between vaccine refusal and those who use alternative medicines (2017, November 24) retrieved 15 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-11-link-vaccine-alternative-medicines.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--