Survey of Delaware Parents Reveals Disparities in Beliefs about the COVID-19 Vaccine for Children

Delaware Journal of Public Health Publishes Results of NIH-Funded Study at Nemours Children's Health

WILMINGTON, Del. (Dec. 21, 2021) – According to a study conducted by Nemours Children's Health, published today in the *Delaware Journal of Public Health,* 54% of Delaware parents and/or guardians (caregivers) would vaccinate their children against COVID-19 while 34% remained uncertain and 12% would not. This survey, conducted prior to approval of the vaccine for children, found disparities across different Delaware communities in beliefs about COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccine that impact a caregiver's intention to vaccinate.

"Concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine may hinder vaccination rates in children and adolescents," said project co-lead Paul Enlow, PhD, a pediatric psychologist and research scientist at Nemours Children's. "We are using results from this survey to shape our continuing work to improve COVID-19 vaccine equity among Delaware children and teens by working to address these still commonly held concerns."

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The research, part of a project funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) through the Delaware ACCEL's COVID-19 Rapid Science Program, surveyed 1,499 parents or other caregivers of Nemours patients (0-21 years of age) in March and April 2021, one year after the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic.

Key findings regarding parent/caregiver beliefs included:

- Health experts and doctors were the most influential source of information about the COVID-19 vaccine for caregivers across all sociodemographic groups -- more than media, friends, family, and a child's school. 70% of caregivers reported that their decision to vaccinate their children against COVID-19 would be influenced by their child's doctor.
- Greater uncertainty regarding intent to vaccinate was found in caregivers of younger children, black children, and those from socio-economically disadvantaged or rural communities. Key factors included questions about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine and their child's susceptibility to COVID-19.

"The disparities in caregiver intention to vaccinate their children seen in our study have translated into disparities in pediatric vaccination rates in Delaware and are consistent with national trends," said project co-lead Thao-Ly Phan, MD, MPH, a pediatrician and research scientist at Nemours Children's. "Even six months after this survey, we see persistent inequities driven by complex social forces and systemic factors like structural racism that point to the need to target modifiable health beliefs and leverage trusted messengers like pediatricians."

Drawing on these findings, Drs. Phan and Enlow, are leading a team of researchers from the Nemours Children's Center for Healthcare Delivery Science, Value-Based Services Organization, Office of Health Equity, and Division of Infectious Disease, to develop strategies to encourage parents and caregivers to vaccinate their children against COVID-19. These approaches employ pediatric healthcare providers, community healthcare workers, and targeted communications to reach out to families and deliver messages tailored to address specific communities' concerns and beliefs about the COVID-19 vaccine, as well as improve access to the vaccine and combat some of the systemic factors contributing to inequities in vaccination rates. The NIH recently awarded additional funding to Nemours Children's and other members of the Delaware Clinical and Translational Research (CTR) ACCEL Program, to develop and test these approaches to foster uptake of pediatric COVID-19 vaccines in diverse communities.

"The solutions under development will be important to the state of Delaware and may offer strategies for other regions," said Mary M. Lee, MD, FAAP, Nemours Children's Chief Scientific Officer and Physician-in-Chief in the Delaware Valley. "This research is a vital part of our commitment to improve health equity and social determinants of health so all children may become their healthiest selves."

About Nemours Children's Health

Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, which includes two free-standing children's hospitals and a network of nearly 75 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high quality care, while also caring for the health of the whole child beyond medicine. Nemours also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the

health of children and teens, Nemours KidsHealth.org.

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves. For more information, visit Nemours.org.

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