The Vaccine Safety Net is a World Health Organization (WHO) initiative that aims to improve global dissemination of balanced evidence-based vaccine safety information via the internet. Through the VSN, WHO identifies websites that provide information on vaccine safety and evaluates them against good information practices criteria established by the Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS). Institutions whose websites meet the criteria are invited to participate in the VSN, and are added to the WHO list of vaccine safety websites meeting good information practices criteria.

Information regarding the Vaccine Safety Net, including the GACVS criteria and a list of VSN members can be accessed at: http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/initiative/communication/network/vaccine_safety_websites/en/

The VSN Newsletter is a new publication that aims to disseminate news and information regarding the VSN, foster communication and synergy among VSN members, and promote good information practices for websites providing information on vaccine safety.

The newsletter will be published in English, on a quarterly basis and can be accessed at: http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/initiative/communication/network/vsn_newsletter1/en/

### VSN news

#### VSN on the agenda for the June 2015 GACVS meeting

During the latter half of 2014, an international working group undertook a review of the VSN criteria for good information practices for vaccine safety websites. The working group presented a revised set of the criteria at the December 2014 meeting of the Global Advisory Committee for Vaccine Safety (GACVS). Overall, the revised criteria were well received, and GACVS provided the working group with helpful feedback, especially with regard to issues of particular sensitivity, including websites’ editorial policies and transparency of sponsorship.

The working group has made the recommended changes and will present the final set of revised criteria for endorsement at the June 2015 GACVS meeting. The working group has also developed a detailed guidance document, intended to serve as a supplement to the list of criteria, which will also be presented to the GACVS. Once endorsed by GACVS, the revised criteria and the guidance document will be posted on the WHO VSN webpages. WHO will provide three months’ notice before the new criteria go into effect. [http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/committee/reports/en/](http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/committee/reports/en/)

#### Robert Pless, GACVS lead on the VSN working group

Robert Pless (MD, MSc) is currently the Medical Specialist for the Vaccine Safety Section at the Public Health Agency of Canada and a member of the Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety since 2011. Robert obtained his MD degree from McMaster University and completed an MSc in epidemiology from the University of Ottawa, and the Field Epidemiology Training Program at Health Canada’s Laboratory Centre for Disease Control where he focused on vaccine safety, subsequently managing the vaccine safety section. He has also worked in drug safety, in immunization safety at the CDC (while on leave from Health Canada), in surveillance infrastructure development, and as a Program Director with the Canadian Field Epidemiology Program… but always returning to one vaccine safety activity or another along the way. While not particularly active on Twitter and Facebook, and does not Blog, he uses these social media services to keep up to date with the latest allegations. He is grateful to the many websites that are able to keep up to date and respond with information that helps the public and health care providers understand and counter the latest vaccine safety issue whether real, under investigation or delusive.
VSN member digest

The VSN member digest contains submissions by VSN members. The authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this section, and they do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the World Health Organization.


Tools and applications that facilitate dissemination of web-based vaccine safety information

New animated video on vaccine development
Contributed by: Gary Finnegan, Editor, Vaccines Today

A new video explaining the safety testing that vaccines undergo prior to approval has been created by the team at Vaccines Today. It can be accessed at: http://www.vaccinestoday.eu/vaccines/how-are-new-vaccines-developed/

Vaccines Today is an online portal meeting the Vaccine Safety Net good information practices criteria and is accredited by Health on the Net. It was launched in 2011 and is supported by Vaccines Europe, a trade association.

The animated video is less than two minutes long and is designed for a general audience. It explains, in simple terms, the high safety standards that vaccines must meet before they are given to patients.

This lively animation shows how clinical trials work, emphasising the fact that vaccine trials are conducted on tens of thousands of healthy volunteers. It also notes that if regulators are satisfied that the highest level of safety testing have been met, all vaccines are continuously monitored even after it has been approved.

The take-home message is clear: the vaccines available to the public today have been through thorough safety testing.

The Vaccines Today Editorial Board, which includes industry representatives, independent health professionals and a patient organisation, supported by a health journalist and a communications consultancy, decided to invest in this new video after another short animated video – explaining herd immunity (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg-Afd7YTJs&list=UUBqIMmJ53QNXnKhY NF-Afw) became one of the most popular videos on the Vaccines Today YouTube channel.

All the videos on the channel can be shared, embedded or freely used by third parties. Ideas for new animated videos about vaccines are always welcome.

Reviewing the rigors of vaccine safety
Contributed by: Deborah Kidd, Senior Communications Officer, Vaccine Development, PATH

Clinical studies are crucial steps along the journey to make sure that every child is protected from vaccine-preventable diseases. A recent blog by PATH’s director of vaccine development explains the rigorous process scientists undertake to evaluate vaccine safety and efficacy. (http://www.path.org/blog/2015/04/rigors-vaccine-testing/).

Central to these efforts are the partnerships among researchers, independent experts, ethicists, manufacturers, donors, nonprofits, and local communities. We were pleased to have the opportunity to shine a spotlight on their collective dedication to ensure access to safe, affordable, and effective vaccines among all children.

While PATH and our partners focus daily on the end goal of ensuring immunization for all, misunderstandings about the risks and benefits of vaccines among small but vocal communities can challenge progress. This blog post aims to counter misconceptions by increasing awareness of the extensive hurdles that each new vaccine candidate must overcome to prove its safety, efficacy, and value for families worldwide, in addition to ongoing safety assessments of existing vaccines by manufacturers and health authorities.

Meanwhile, recognizing that stories are often just as powerful as statistics—and at times more persuasive—PATH and our partners continued the online conversation during World Immunization Week. The Protecting Kids blog series highlights the lifesaving impact of vaccines through stories of individual children and families. To see all the posts in the series, please visit PATH’s roundup page (http://www.path.org/blog/2015/04/protecting-kids/).
WHO tools and resources

New aide-memoire on AEFI investigation

Available at: [http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/initiative/investigation/New_aide-memoire_AEFI.pdf](http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/initiative/investigation/New_aide-memoire_AEFI.pdf)

WHO recently published a new aide-memoire that proposes a systematic, standardized process to investigate reported serious adverse events following immunization (AEFI) and ascertain the underlying cause of the AEFI.

The aide-memoire is intended to serve as a key instrument to organize an AEFI investigation. It includes a checklist providing useful information for each step of an investigation and a graphic illustrating suggested steps for identifying the most likely cause of a cluster of AEFI.

Framework for developing national manual for surveillance of Adverse Events Following Immunization

Recent developments in the field of AEFI include the revised AEFI classification, revised causality assessment methodology, determination of core information to collect, newer concepts in AEFI detection, investigation, data collection and analysis and information processing and sharing. In September 2014, the Global Vaccine Safety and Vigilance (SAV) team in WHO compiled these new developments and published the Global manual for surveillance of AEFI that can be accessed at [http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/publications/Global_Manual_on_Surveillance_of_AEFI.pdf](http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/publications/Global_Manual_on_Surveillance_of_AEFI.pdf)

AEFI training incorporating the recent concepts have started in several low and middle income countries (LMIC) particularly in the AFRO, EMRO, SEARO and WPRO regions. These countries are currently in the process of adapting these new concepts into their national AEFI surveillance and response systems. Some countries have indicated that they lack the experts and expertise to quickly develop a high quality national technical document (Manual) that could immediately address their national needs and simultaneously incorporate the global vision and strategy.

Rapidly establishing credible AEFI surveillance systems becomes critical, particularly in the context of the introduction of vaccines such as human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines and inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) in national programs and probable introduction of “new” vaccines and vaccines under development such as Ebola, malaria, dengue, Japanese encephalitis, typhoid conjugate and a new TB vaccine.

WHO has been requested by countries to develop a “framework” for developing a national manual for surveillance of AEFI based on the model of the global manual on surveillance of AEFI. The framework could be easily adapted by countries’ own national programs for developing their national manual that meets global standards. This will also ensure that there is harmonization of procedures particularly for sharing information and communication across countries and globally.

What this framework will do

- Provide guidance for national programs to rapidly develop their national AEFI manual that meets global standards.
- Provide the means to develop a manual tailored to suit the local country context.
- Assist countries to explore and identify various options to establish AEFI surveillance systems.

What this framework will not do

- Replace independent thinking, decision and policy making.
- Establish roles and responsibilities in AEFI surveillance at the local level.
- Replace national forms and formats, unless the country desires to use the forms and formats provided in this framework without any change.

For further details, please contact the Global Vaccine Safety team at gvsi@who.int
Spotlight on Caring for Kids

In order to underscore the diversity of the VSN and recognize each member’s efforts to provide users with high quality information on vaccine safety, the VSN Newsletter will highlight a different member in each edition. This month VSN shines the spotlight on the Canadian Paediatric Society’s Caring for Kids website, a member since 2005.

The Caring for Kids website (CFK) is developed by the Canadian Paediatric Society and provides parents with reliable information about the health and well-being of their children and adolescents. Caring for Kids covers more than 160 health topics such as pregnancy and baby care, immunization, illnesses and infections, safety, healthy eating, literacy and learning, growth and development, behaviour and parenting, and teen health. The website is available in English http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/ and French http://www.soindslenosenfants.cps.ca/

During a recent question and answer session with the VSN team, Francine Charbonneau, Manager of Public Affairs, provided insight into the Caring for Kids’ visitor profile, new features that enhance user experience, and one of the site’s latest design successes.

How many users access your sites each month, and what are the most frequently visited sections?

Combined, the English and French CFK websites serve 200 000 visitors per month and 2.4 million visitors per year.

The most visited vaccine related pages in 2014 included

- Chickenpox
- Common infections and your child
- Influenza in children
- Vaccination and your child
- Meningococcal vaccine
- Hepatitis B vaccine
- 5-in-1 vaccine
- Rotavirus vaccine

In terms of global reach, international users make up 49% of total visits to CFK’s English website and 68% of total visits to CFK’s French website. The majority of these visits originate from Australia, Belgium, France, India, Morocco, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Describe some of the newest features added to your websites to enhance user experience.

We are in the process of adding a dedicated video page featuring Canadian Paediatric Society members on various topics like mental health, early literacy and the importance of physical activity. Although these videos are available on our YouTube channel, this dedicated page will allow visitors to access the embedded videos seamlessly, without having to leave the Caring for Kids website and its resources.

Parents and caregivers are often on the go, juggling numerous priorities. During those busy times, many access the Internet from their tablets or smartphones. Being mindful of this trend and need for convenience, we are developing a mobile-friendly version of the Caring for Kids website, which will feature simpler navigation and readability for users. We hope to have this functional, mobile-friendly site up and running in mid-2015.

Has CFK received any recent awards or distinctions?

The Consumer Health Information Providers Interest Group / Canadian Health Libraries Association ranked CFK as one of the top 10 Canadian Consumer Health Websites in 2010.

Describe an aspect of the website of which you are particularly proud.

Our goal is to help parents make informed decisions about their children’s health by producing reliable and accessible health information for parents and others who care for children. Thanks to the dedicated volunteers on our expert committees and board of directors (which are made up of practicing paediatricians from across Canada), we are particularly proud of our Illnesses & Infections page, which features numerous fact sheets on common childhood and adolescent illnesses and infections, tests and treatments, and up-to-date information on child and youth vaccines. This section also includes factual information on vaccine safety, a parent’s guide to immunization information on the Internet, and a MMR: Myths and Facts document.

Describe one of your site’s design successes.

We have successfully integrated our social media channels into our homepage. It has certainly helped increase our overall visibility within the internet sphere, driving more traffic to the site. We are also very satisfied with the easy navigation on the site. The navigation is user-friendly, intuitive and offers a helpful search function based on ages and stages and specific subjects.

What are CFK’s plans for the future?

We are eager to continue populating Caring for Kids with more informative fact sheets on topics that are top of mind with parents and caregivers. Later this spring, we will be conducting a survey with our parent community. It’s important for us to get regular feedback on the type of information they seek. Caring for Kids Parent Community volunteers help the Canadian Paediatric Society ensure that the website meets the needs of parents and caregivers. Through surveys and polls, they help shape improvements to the site on a regular basis.

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