

Vax turnoff: it's the reaction that counts

by Marie McNamara

PARENTS who decide to discontinue vaccination for their children usually do so in response to an adverse reaction which they see as being poorly handled.

They seek support from family, friends, others with similar experiences and alternative health professionals and gather information from media reports, brochures, critical texts and study of medical journals, a national survey has established.

Acquisition of knowledge, particularly when it coincided with their experiences, was the most influential factor leading parents to decide not to continue their children's immunisation schedule, said leading researcher Associate Professor

Elizabeth Davies from the school of nursing at the Australian Catholic University in Queensland.

Respondents were generally well-educated, middle-income,

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heterosexual couples born in Australia, she said.

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The group had many demographic similarities with complying parents, she said.

Many described themselves as previously trusting or ignorant about health matters, and all reported at least one incidence of their children's adverse reaction to a vaccination.

"These events so alarmed parents that they usually sought assistance from a health professional, predominantly the family GP," she said.

Feelings of lack of support from their health professional at the time of distress were an important motivator in their turning away from vaccination.

"They felt dissatisfied, angry, frustrated and disempowered."

Media advertisements attracted 310 parents wanting to participate in the survey, of whom 76 met the criteria. It was a national questionnaire survey and just over half came from Queensland.

Professor Davies added that for those parents who chose to discontinue, there seemed to be a significant degree of stigma. **MO**