

Media Release

Embargoed 11.01am 2 March 2016

What the public thinks

Dr Google: Consulted, but not trusted

Dr Google is a popular source of information for Australian parents worried about their children's health, but it is not one they trust, new research has found.

The second [Australian Child Health Poll](#) has found that more than 60 per cent of parents used websites, blogs and online forums to get child health information in the last six months – but a surprising 30 per cent did not trust them “at all”.

The poll's Director, paediatrician Dr Anthea Rhodes, said the survey had revealed a “trust deficit” as Australian parents try to navigate their way through a complex landscape of child health information.

“This poll shows us for the first time that Australian parents are using sources of child health information that they just don't trust,” Dr Rhodes said.

“This means that in seeking to better inform themselves about their kids' health, parents may be consuming so much information that, ultimately, they become more worried and confused.

“The question for the health care sector is, what happens as a result of this trust deficit?

“One of the most startling figures in these results is that 50 per cent of parents used a hospital including Emergency Departments (ED), for child health advice in the past six months.

“Hospital EDs are highly trusted, but they are not the best place for the care of children with lower acuity conditions, who will typically face long wait times as critical patients are treated first.”

Dr Rhodes said the second Australian Child Health Poll suggested some solutions to help bridge the trust deficit by focusing on the provision of credible, accurate and consistent information at the sources most commonly used by parents.

These include pharmacists, who ranked third most used and fifth most trusted of all sources included in the survey; and school teachers, who were used as a source of child health information in the past six months by nearly 50 per cent of parents.

Helping parents to evaluate the trustworthiness of online child health information sites, and doing more to promote awareness of those sites that contain independent, authoritative child health care information, would also help.

“Pharmacists are high profile and readily accessible in local communities, so it's not surprising that they figure so prominently in these results,” Dr Rhodes said.

“Independent, authoritative information about child health distributed through these businesses would quickly reach the target audience of parents and carers.

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“Likewise, our teachers know a lot about our children, but they are not medical professionals, so investment in providing child health information through our schools would be very sensible.”

Dr Rhodes said the poll results showed that Australian parents were savvy consumers when it came to seeking reliable information about their children’s health, with celebrities and social media the worst performing information sources in terms of trust.

She said GPs were the most trusted and most used source of child health information, and could play an important role in helping families to evaluate and assess information obtained online and elsewhere.

“The poll tells us that 90 per cent of parents have a GP who provides health care to their child, but while almost two thirds of parents ‘sometimes’ discuss information they’ve found online with their GP, another 20 per cent almost never do,” Dr Rhodes said.

“Creating space in a consultation to talk to parents in a non-judgemental way about information they’ve found online, or via any other sources, could really help to give parents confidence in their own judgement.

“It’s also a good opportunity for a GP to recommend online sites that are credible and accurate, but which parents might not know about,” Dr Rhodes said.

The Australian Child Health Poll has been developed to help build an evidence base around key issues in child and adolescent health. It is produced quarterly by The Royal Children’s Hospital.

For more information and media resources, including an interview with a family, audio and video, see www.childhealthpoll.org.au

Data Source

The second RCH Australian Child Health Poll is a survey of a nationally representative sample of 2100 adults aged 19 years and older. All respondents were parents or caregivers to children aged less than 18 years. The survey is conducted by an independent research agency on behalf of The Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne. Each sample is subsequently weighted to reflect the latest Australian population figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.

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Child health information sources **what parents use and trust**

Used	Rank	Trusted
General practitioner (92%)	1	General practitioner (75%)
Friends, family (78%)	2	Hospital, including Emergency (60%)
Pharmacist (78%)	3	Paediatrician (54%)
Websites, blogs, online forums (61%)	4	Psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor (38%)
Books, magazines, newspapers (53%)	5	Pharmacist (37%)
Hospital, including Emergency (48%)	6	Speech therapist, occupational therapist, other allied health (32%)
School teacher, childhood educator (48%)	7	Well child nurse (31%)
Paediatrician (40%)	8	Telephone advice helpline (25%)
Speech therapist, occupational therapist, other allied health (35%)	9	Friends, family (25%)
Well child nurse (34%)	10	School teacher, childhood educator (17%)
Social media (34%)	11	Alternative health therapist (13%)
Telephone advice helpline (31%)	12	Books, magazines, newspapers (6%)
Psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor (29%)	13	Websites, blogs, online forums (6%)
Alternative health therapist (29%)	14	Celebrities (3%)
Celebrities (12%)	15	Social media (3%)