

Editorial

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Vaccinate? There should be no Question

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As a child, my parents never thought twice about whether or not my siblings and I would get our vaccinations, we just got them. I don't know if my mother's decision was in part because she was a nurse or if it was just the right thing to do as a parent. But as an adult, I'm thankful she made the decision to vaccinate us. I never have to worry that I may have been exposed to the measles because I went on a fantasy ride called "It's a Small World". I wonder how these non-vaccinated children will feel about their parent's decision not to immunize them when they are adults?

As a parent of 3 children, a neonatal and pediatric nurse and a nursing faculty at a university where I teach pediatrics, community/public health, and health and wellness, I have never felt stronger about children receiving their vaccinations. I understand and agree with an immunocompromised child not being able to get vaccinated, that's where herd immunity comes into play. But not vaccinating your child due to a personal belief that the government should not have the right to dictate a proven practice that has eradicated deadly diseases such as small pox? That, I do not understand.

The chief medical correspondent for CNN, Dr. Sanjay Gupta stated that vaccines have prevented 6 million deaths every year worldwide and have fundamentally changed modern medicine. Dr. Gupta also said that we are 100 times more likely to be struck by lightning than to have a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine that protects us against measles. Yet, parents are still choosing not to vaccinate their children.

Not immunizing children has an impact on the child and the family. Besides the discomfort, potential long term adverse affects and even death the child may face by getting a vaccine preventable disease, the child misses school; the child misses friends; the child misses socialization; they are even quarantined in their own homes isolated from their non-vaccinated siblings. In turn, parents miss work to care for their sick child. In 2012, a study of 310 working parents of children under 6 years old was done by University of Michigan's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The study looked at the impact of a child's illness on their families. While this study did not specifically focus on vaccine preventable diseases it emphasized the impact of having a sick child at home. Here are three of the key findings from the survey:

- 50 percent of the parents said that making other child-care arrangements was difficult.
- 33 percent said that taking time off from work to care for their sick child was difficult because doing so meant they lost pay or put their job at risk.
- 31 percent said that they didn't receive enough paid time off from work to care for their sick child.

Take chicken pox, a highly communicable disease with an incidence that has significantly decreased due to the varicella vaccination. A child with chicken pox maybe home for 10-14 days before all of the lesions are crusted over. Imagine the impact on the working family if the household has multiple non-vaccinated children who develop symptoms at different times!

A 2014 study from the University of Colorado School of Medicine stated every year,

30,000 people on average die of vaccine preventable illnesses, almost all of them adults. Amy Parker is an adult whose health-nut parents did not vaccinate her. She contracted many communicable diseases as an adult, including vaccine preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, whooping cough, chickenpox and human papillomavirus. Thankfully, Amy survived all of her illnesses. Today, she has children of her own and her personal experience as a non-vaccinated adult is what prompts her to vaccinate her children and herself. Amy states she knows far more adults and children who suffer from complications of preventable childhood illnesses than those who suffer complications from vaccines. What is of utmost importance to Amy is if she did not vaccinate her children she would knowingly be exposing them to childhood illnesses, which she states is cruel.

In the midst of all the controversy that exists around vaccinations (autism, death with Gardasil, overwhelming the immune system) I, like Amy made the decision to have my children receive all of their vaccinations. I made this decision because I too was thinking about their future health status, their future as older children in school and eventually their future health as adults. It is our responsibility as health care providers and parents to protect our children, to make the right decisions for them when they cannot, to make decisions they will benefit from for their entire lives, to vaccinate them.