

# Social psychological reasons for increasing vaccination rates



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1) In the first 6 months of 2018, 41,000 cases of measles had been reported in the EU, causing at least 37 measles-related deaths. This spike in measles infections has been related to the declining rate of vaccinations. This decline is likely caused by the paired belief that measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases are harmless and that vaccines are unsafe. Though information on the falsity of both of these claims is readily available, it has not prevented the decline in the rate of vaccinations below a safe level. What social psychological concepts or theories could help increase the rate of vaccinations? How could these concepts or theories help?

Social psychological theories can be used to address pressing social problems such as the increasing rate of disease-related deaths due to decline in vaccinations. They can help people form and change attitudes and influence other people's behavior with the power of social norms.

One approach to getting people to receive more vaccinations is to remind them of social norms, "the rules a group has for the acceptable behaviors, values, and beliefs of its members". There are two kinds of norms people follow: injunctive norms, "people's perceptions of what behaviors are approved or disapproved of by others", and descriptive norms, "people's perceptions of how people actually behave". If people believe that a certain behavior is strongly disapproved of by their social group (e.g. that people are not getting vaccinations) and they observe that others are obeying the norm (receiving vaccinations), they are heavily inclined to follow the norm.

A field experiment by Reno (1993) wherein an experimental assistant displayed an injunctive norm against littering, by picking up a fast-food bag

that had been disposed of on the ground. The researchers hypothesized that viewing the assistant pick up the bag would be a powerful cue of the injunctive norm, that littering is wrong and other people would disapprove of it and consequently would lower people's disposition to litter. They were accurate; virtually no one who saw the assistant pick up the fast food bag took a handout that had been placed on their windshield and threw it on the ground. In a control condition, wherein the assistant walked by, 37% threw the handout on the ground. This could be related to attempting to increase the rate of vaccinations in that where people view that getting vaccinations is a norm, they will be more inclined to receive them and reject the belief that vaccines are unsafe.

An alternative way of transmitting descriptive norms is purely telling people what most others do, predominantly in conditions which you cannot directly examine behavior. In hotel rooms there are signs asking you to reuse your towel. Researchers found that the typical plea to help the environment worked less well than one stating, " join your fellow guests in helping to save the environment" and went on to communicate that 75% of guests reuse their towels. The simple message that " other people do it" can be enough to get people to do the right thing (Nolan et al, 2008). If this is the case, the public being told and viewing other people having vaccinations and holding the opinion of vaccinations being safe will result in an increase in vaccinations and a decline in diseases.

Inducing Hypocrisy increases compliance and help increase the rate of vaccinations. Elliot Aronson and his students applied a technique called " the hypocrisy procedure", which proved successful previously in getting people <https://assignbuster.com/social-psychological-reasons-for-increasing-vaccination-rates/>

to increase their use of condoms. The process involved interrupting female students who were on their way to the women's shower room. In one experimental condition, participants were asked to make a public commitment, urging others to take measures to sustain water. Importantly, they were invited to sign their names to a public poster that read "Take short showers. Turn shower off while soaping up. If I can do it, so can you!". In this "hypocrisy" condition, participants were not only made aware of their own inefficient behavior, but also had to signify publicly that they were exercising water conservation, although until now they were not. They were made mindful that they were "preaching behavior that they themselves were not practicing".

Those partakers who were made to feel like hypocrites altered their behavior so they could feel moral about themselves. The hypocrisy technique has also been discovered to increase other environmentally comprehensive practices, for instance recycling (Fried and Aronson, 1995). Inducing hypocrisy in a similar way to the research findings above could increase the rate of vaccinations if you followed the same procedures. For example, you could interrupt parents about to go into a doctor's surgery and inform them of the declining rate of vaccinations along with the damaging consequences, reassuring them that vaccinations are safe and urge them to get their child vaccinated to prevent such results. Publicly signing a document once done, would encourage more parents to do the same if they saw a substantial number of names and consequently have a snowball effect and increase the vaccination rates.

It is suggested that an elite way to modify people's behavior is making it easy for them to do so. Various psychologists have concentrated on transforming people's attitudes, because doing so frequently leads to alterations in behavior. Several studies have uncovered that people's attitudes toward recycling are good indications of their recycling behaviors, proposing that a mass media campaign that pursues people's attitudes is a good way to go. (Knussen, Yule & Mackenzie, 2004). Kurt Lewin (1947), made the reflection that big social changes can occur by "removing small barriers from people's environments". This idea has been applied to many real life dilemmas such as recycling. Increasing the number of recycling bins in a neighborhood, establishing curbside recycling and consenting residents to mix materials have been understood to increase communities' recycling behaviors.

One experiment observed that offering office workers with a recycling box that they could retain next to their desk significantly increased the volume of recycled paper. The undemanding accessibility of putting a box next to their desk compared to taking it to an inner location, was enough to modify people's behavior. (Holland, Aarts & Langendam, 2006). Making it easier for people to receive vaccinations is likely increase the rates. This could be done by offering free services in all local doctor's surgery's or even GP's doing home visits. Alternatively, a mass media campaign could be used to change people's attitudes on the safety and necessity of vaccinations against diseases.

Overall, its clear to see the extent of the effects that social psychology can have in helping the environment and particularly how theories could be applied to the problem of declining rates of vaccinations.

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