

The importance of vaccinations for children



India Tuggle Mr. Stewart ENG 101-A18 Project 5 December 10, 2012 The Importance of Vaccinations for Children Since Edward Jenner introduced the first vaccine, a vaccination against smallpox, in 1778 (Allen, 48) the world has been a bit skeptical. The concept of inoculation is counter-intuitive—what sense does it make to inject a healthy person with the very virus they're trying to prevent he or she from contracting? The very idea of it seems dangerous, even reckless. The issue with this uneasy feeling about the safety and sense of vaccinations is ignorance.

We do not fully understand our own body's immune systems; therefore we cannot fully understand how vaccinations work. Many people are under the impression that extremely harmful diseases are, for the most part, wiped out or incredibly rare. They may not see the reason for immunizing themselves or their children. But the truth of the matter is that these incredibly harmful, even deadly diseases are very much prevalent in today's world. People come into contact with these infectious viruses on a daily basis; it is only our immune systems that keep the infections at bay.

And our immune systems can only fight off these diseases through the use of vaccinations. There is a growing percentage of the population that is choosing against vaccinating their children. These parents against child inoculation have various reasons for opting not to vaccinate, including health concerns, cost of medical treatment, religious or philosophical beliefs, or their place of residence. Large portions of the anti-immunization population see vaccines as being unsafe.

There have been countless claims that vaccines are dangerous and cause brain damage, mental retardation, and even arrested physical development.

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Some radical anti-vaccination activists assert that parents would be better off to not even vaccinate their children at all. One of the biggest controversies against vaccines is that the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine is supposedly linked to autism, a developmental disorder of the brain in which parts of the brain are damaged or do not develop properly.

Autism is an incurable condition marked by an array of symptoms including difficulty understanding and using language, problems socializing and communicating with other people, inability to cope with changes in routine, repetitive body movements or behavioral patterns, and uncommon reactions to loud noises. Since autism's recognition as a disease in 1943 (Allen, 371) there is still very little known about its causes. We have now found that autism is a congenital (being present at birth) disorder, but for whatever reason normally seems to become noticeable between the ages of 1 and 2.

This is around the same time that children begin receiving MMR vaccines. The vaccination and autism seem to be related, but are merely a coincidence. In 2001 the World Health Organization released a statement supporting the use of MMR vaccine. It said, " WHO strongly endorses the use of MMR vaccine on the grounds of its convincing record of safety and efficiency...There has been no new scientific evidence that would suggest impaired safety of MMR.

On the contrary, all results from vaccine trials published reaffirm the high safety of MMR vaccine. " (Saffer, 93.) It is true that vaccines are not completely risk free nor 100% effective, but there has been a consistent decline of childhood disease related deaths since vaccinations were put into

routine use (Saffer, 10.) Certain vaccines can cause side effects such as fever, rash, diarrhea, and aches and pains. Some more severe side effects include serious allergic reactions, encephalitis (swelling of the brain), and seizures.

These are extremely rare conditions and occur in about 1 out of one million doses (Link, 60.) Today's new parents know little of the diseases these vaccines are protecting against. They view the rare side effects as being an unacceptable risk but have no experience with the devastating reality of the actual disease. Today in a mostly immunized population, some parents may choose to avoid these risks by opting not to inoculate their children.

They see that this way, with most of the population being protected, that their child will not contract the disease because they are unlikely to come into contact with an infected person and do not have to worry about the potential side effects of the vaccinations. This concept is called herd immunity. An example of the problem with this aspect of protection is that children under the age of 1 cannot receive the MMR vaccine. There is not a serious danger of them being infected by these viruses before this age because the people surrounding them have created a barrier between the child and the disease because they have been vaccinated and therefore cannot infect others. However, if an unimmunized individual comes into the population they create a hole in the barrier against infection. This unimmunized person is now a susceptible dwelling where the disease can grow and replicate, and therefore infect others who have not yet been vaccinated or who have fallen slightly behind their immunization schedule.

Since it is not only infants and toddlers that are at risk of contracting these viruses, all 50 states have employed requirements for children to be vaccinated upon entering the public school system. However, according to "School Vaccination Requirements: Historical, Social, and Legal Perspectives," all 50 states accept some form of exemption from these requirements (5.) Many parents against these vaccination requirements argue that it is a violation of their parental rights. They believe that they should decide what form of medical care their child receives.

Parents should have say-so over most aspects of their child's health care. But what these parents are not realizing is that by choosing not to inoculate their children, they are putting so many other children at risk. The issue of parents choosing not to vaccinate their children is very severe. However only a small percentage of the population are unimmunized, if any of them come into contact with not yet vaccinated children or children behind on their booster shots they put them at risk of contracting these terrifying diseases.

As for the aforementioned measles virus, according to a report from the Oregon Dept. of Human Services, " Measles is so contagious that two to three minutes spent in an ER or doctor's office waiting room may be sufficient to infect people who pass through the same room hours later. " (Saffer, 8.) If the MMR vaccine cannot be administered until the age of 1 and any unvaccinated, possibly infected individual comes into even remote contact with this young child, think of what potential harm they are in. As a parent, thinking about any potential harm to your child is unbearable.

It is understandable why when hearing about the more severe of side effects from certain vaccines many people are frightened. What parents have to

remember and focus on are the statistics of the occurrences of these harmful side effects. Vaccines have been proven to be both safe and effective and have now been in routine use for over 200 years. And there has been a consistent decline in the rate of child disease related deaths since the introduction of vaccines. And as a parent, they should understand that it is in no way acceptable to place another child in harm's way.

It can also be unnerving for a parent to hear that they are forced to have certain medications administered to their children. What they must keep in mind is the wide array of diseases and viruses this medication is protecting their child against. Works Cited Allen, Arthur. Vaccine. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. , 2007. Print Diekema, Douglas S. M. D. " Responding to Parental Refusals of Immunization of Children. " Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics 115. 5 (2005): 1428-1431.

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