

By Li Cohen

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One topic, one million opinions. The conversation surrounding vaccinating children often makes headlines, whether it's professionals debating with parents, or celebrities who refuse to vaccinate their children in belief that they will cause autism, alter immune systems, release toxins, and overall, deem them not necessary as many communicable diseases are eradicated.

Although thousands of people make these arguments against vaccinations, licensed health professionals from around the world continue to support childhood vaccinations. Richard Benson from the Centers for Disease Control provided some information on these arguments.

Myth No. 1: Vaccines cause autism

When celebrity Jenny McCarthy published her book "Louder Than Words: A Mother's Journal in Healing Autism," in which she attributed her son's alleged autism to the vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), many parents got on board with her ideals. In the book, McCarthy alleged that her son developed autism when he was two years old a few months after receiving his vaccinations and that it was only through treatments and therapies that her son was cured from the developmental disorder.

McCarthy's and many parents' basis for this myth stems from research conducted by Andrew Wakefield who lost his medical license after manipulating data and research to show that the MMR vaccine causes autism.

The CDC reports that numerous studies conducted since Wakefield's data prove that vaccines do not cause autism. What does cause the disorder, according to Autism Speaks, is a combination of genetic and environmental factors, including genetics, advanced parent age and pregnancy and birth issues. The organization also acknowledges that vaccines do not cause autism.

Myth No. 2: Vaccines damage children's immune systems

The amount of vaccines required for children, especially the ones before a child's second birthday, can be intimidating for many parents; however, they are all necessary to ensure babies retain a healthy immune system. While many people believe that so much exposure to contagions actually causes illnesses, all vaccines contain antigens from inactive viruses. Essentially, there is only a miniscule amount of antigens within a vaccine and the amount that is present is significantly weakened.

The feeling of being sick after a vaccine is the body's immune system working to protect your body and is a normal response. Once the weakened virus enters the body, the immune system registers the virus and knows to kill it if it were to ever enter the body again. This activity does cause some individuals to feel mild side effects, but those symptoms should be gone within a few days and are not a result of a viral infection.

Myth No. 3: Vaccines don't do anything because polio, meningitis, rubella, etc. are eradicated

There is a substantial difference between a disease being eradicated and eliminated. Eliminated diseases are those that no longer circulate throughout a particular region, such as polio, measles and diphtheria in the United States. Eradicated diseases are those that no longer circulate worldwide, and the only such disease to date is smallpox.

Because diseases that are eliminated in the U.S. are still found globally, it is still possible to contract any disease that someone is not vaccinated for. If an unvaccinated individual were to come in contact with a disease and bring it back to the U.S., it could easily spread to others who are not vaccinated as well, bringing a cycle of the disease back to the U.S.

The reason vaccines are no longer seen throughout the country or seen as prevalent throughout the world is because of the development of their respective vaccines. Failure to keep up vaccine schedules opens the doors for those diseases, namely polio, meningitis and rubella, to become much more prevalent.

Myth No. 4: Vaccines actually infect children with the disease and contain toxins

The ill feeling many children and adults experience after a vaccine is the immune system's natural response to a foreign body entering the body. This same feeling can happen from accidentally pricking your finger or coming in contact with an allergen.

The chemicals found in vaccines are in miniscule doses that cannot harm the human body. Such chemicals may include preservatives to prevent contamination, adjuvants to stimulate the immune system to register and attack viruses and stabilizers to make sure parts of the vaccine are not lost while the body registers and stores the vaccine's information.

A full list of the chemicals in vaccines can be found on the CDC's website.

Myth No. 5: Not vaccinating a child does not put anyone else at risk

When something isn't visible, it's easy to imagine it simply doesn't exist. A common misconception is that vaccinations have become irrelevant because the illnesses they aim to prevent are no longer around. The truth is, however, that those illnesses are not eradicated, they are simply under control because of the vaccinations. Parents are encouraged to vaccinate their children for hepatitis, rotavirus, diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis, haemophilus influenzae, pneumococcal conjugate, polio, MMR, meningitis, and human papillomavirus, all of which can be fatal and easily spread if developed.

Lest not forget the black plague that killed 60 percent of Europeans, the smallpox that killed 30 percent of those who contracted it, and more recently, the 147 people sickened with measles in 2014 after the disease had been declared completely eradicated from the U.S. in 2010. All of those infected in the 2014 outbreak had not received their measles vaccinations and it took only one person infected with the disease attending Disneyland to cause the devastation.

The recommended schedule and dosage of vaccines can be found online or at your local facility. Any questions or concerns about vaccines should be brought up with your health care provider.

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