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Childhood Vaccination: Definitely Worth a Shot

Stanley Plotkin, a physician, scientist, scholar, and advocate of vaccination once said, “With the exception of safe water, no other modality, not even antibiotics, has had such a major effect on mortality reduction and population growth.” Vaccines are a key to life. Vaccination has been strongly integrated into modern medicine and is considered a necessity. However, during the recent decade, anti-vaccine movements, powered by complaints from parents filled with worries for their children, have emerged. False claims about the specific effects of the immunizations have spread like wildfire through the internet, causing many parents to opt not to vaccinate their children, or refuse certain essential vaccinations. Ignorant celebrities giving their uneducated input also influence the opinion of the parent population because as the saying goes, if it’s on the internet, it must be true. Despite the controversy, vaccinations are an important part of everyday life, and I think vaccines are essential in ensuring that the youth of the world are protected from fatal diseases.

Public health officials and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provide a recommended set of vaccinations for every child to have by the age of six. This includes the vital vaccines that are administered before the child reaches the age of two. Vaccines can protect children under two years of age from fourteen serious diseases such as *Haemophilus influenza* and pneumococcal infections. Both are diseases that attack the child’s immune system and flood

the body with harmful bacteria. Without the proper prevention vaccinations, these diseases can be fatal. Vaccinations are administered early in life to protect infants and children by providing immunity proactively, before being exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases (*Childhood Immunization Schedule*).

The main argument against vaccinating children is the idea that a child's immune system can fight off most infections naturally. Opponents to vaccinations say that injecting questionable vaccine ingredients into a child may cause side effects including seizures, paralysis and death. A new study conducted by National Institute for Public Health and Environment in the Netherlands showed that most side effects to the vaccines were from underlying genetic causes, not the shot itself (Scutti). The medical data from 990 children showed that only 45 had a seizure after being vaccinated. Twenty-six of the 45 had underlying genetic reasons for why the seizure was triggered. It was proven that the seizures were stress induced from receiving the shot. This means that childhood vaccinations only mildly increase the risk of post-vaccine seizures in the general pediatric population during specific risk periods (Verbeek et al.). However, the inkling of doubt is causing many parents to refuse vaccinations for their children.

Anti-vaccine activists decide not to vaccinate their children, which later place other children and community members at risk. Since vaccination decisions affect not only mothers and children, but the whole world, these decisions cannot be treated as individual ones. In 2014, the United States experienced an alarming number of measles cases, with 667 cases from 27 states. The majority of the people who were plagued with measles were unvaccinated and the first case stemmed from a 10-year-old living in Orange County, Florida. Patient One then spread the disease to unvaccinated siblings, later referred to as Patient Two, Patient Three, and Patient Four. These patients did not attend school, but continued in after school activities like daycare

and sports teams, which spread the disease to even more people (*Measels Outbreak*), some vaccinated but most not (Carroll). Although certain vaccines are required for entry into school, the federal government allows for exceptions, such as ethical or religious reasons that vaccines do not need to be administered. To combat the threat of unvaccinated children spreading diseases, schools in New York refused unvaccinated students the right to come to school as a matter of public health. Lawsuits were filed against the school district in attempt to grant the children education, but the court ruled in favor of the city schools, citing that the government has the power to make decisions that will protect the general public (Carroll). I believe the court made the correct decision. Immunizations are important. They allow protection for those who cannot protect themselves.

When it comes to the point where individual decisions might harm the community, I believe the government should have the right to mandate vaccination. Diseases that require vaccination should not be taken lightly. As someone who comes from a family of medical professionals, immunization and health are important beliefs to uphold. One hundred years ago, infectious diseases were the number one cause of death (Kane and Lasher). Now that we have the ability to reduce this statistic, why not use it?

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