

Voices in the vaccine debate

Part 1: The Pediatrician

In this three part series, I will share the perspectives of three different women (who also happen to be mothers) when it comes to the vaccine debate. I asked all of them the same exact questions and will run their responses in their own words.

Dr. Lainie Holman specializes in Pediatric Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (dual board-certified). She finished residency in 2007 and has two grown, not-autistic children. Here are her responses:

Q. Describe your professional and/or personal experiences with vaccinations.

A. I'm a pediatrician and have cared for a number of children affected by vaccine-preventable illnesses.

Q. What are vaccines?

A. They are compounds that resemble pathogens enough to engage the immune system. After the body "sees" the vaccine, it "remembers" it enough to fight it better or entirely when exposed to the wild pathogen.

Q. Do you have your children vaccinated?

A. Yes. Although my partner at the time was afraid of vaccines, so my oldest was not completely on time.

Q. Why do people choose to have their children vaccinated?

A. Because they don't want them to die from something preventable. The same reason they use car safety seats. Also, because they feel a social obligation to protect others.

Q. Why do people choose not to vaccinate their children?

A. Because they are afraid. Because they don't remember the diseases that are now mostly eliminated. Because a now-discredited physician wrote a false paper linking MMR to autism. Because we have the blinding privilege to think our children are more special than others'. Because they don't understand epidemiology.

Q. What are the potential consequences (positive or negative) when people choose to have their children vaccinated?

A. Pain at the injection site, fever, rash, allergic reaction. Sometimes, a fever can trigger a seizure. This is rare and not dangerous. There is some association rarely with transverse myelitis. But that is unclear.

Q. What are the potential consequences (positive or negative) when people choose not to have their children vaccinated?

A. Death. Brain damage. Permanent disability. Hearing loss, blindness, sterility, pneumonia, epiglottitis. Did I mention death?

Q. Who benefits from vaccinations?

A. Individuals and society.

Q. Do you believe parents should be legally obligated to vaccinate their children?

A. Almost. I believe that parents should be educated. Most either don't understand or have erroneous information.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to say about this issue?

A. I have many patients with congenital rubella who are profoundly disabled. I also have patients with permanent encephalopathy and seizures from preventable meningitis or encephalitis. I have a patient who has an anoxic brain injury after cardiac arrest as a result of sepsis. I have seen a 14-day old die from pertussis. They don't really cough much, they just stop breathing. I have cared for patients with complications from hepatitis and pneumonia. I personally have taken care of many children hospitalized with influenza. I also care for patients who are immunocompromised who cannot be vaccinated. I have had patients with post-polio syndrome. I hope these epidemics will be enough of a wake-up call that people will stop being so impervious to science and fact. If not, well, enjoy polio.

Also, if you don't immunize your children, please, please, do not lie to health care providers about it. Vaccination removes many diagnoses from the thoughts of most of us. Not being vaccinated returns those possibilities. Please don't lie.

Dr. Holman also shared this interesting article with me about the link between vaccines (and everything else) and autism.