Vaccine Controversy on Frontline

By ACSH Staff — April 28, 2010

PBS’s Frontline last night examined vaccines[1] and the increasingly bitter debate between the public health establishment and a formidable populist coalition of parents, celebrities, politicians and activists who are determined to resist pressure from the medical and public health establishments to vaccinate, despite established scientific consensus about vaccine safety.

The typical anti-vaccine crowd made an appearance, says Dr. Ross. You have the D-list actress Jenny McCarthy saying children’s immune systems can’t handle vaccines and anti-vaccine zealot Barbara Loe Fisher implying that the government and pharmaceutical companies are in some kind of corrupt conspiracy to sell vaccines that hurt kids. In fact, vaccines are responsible for much of past years improvement in public health, and their importance is never clearer than when parents neglect to vaccinate their children and vaccine-preventable diseases like measles resurge.

Frontline also spoke with credible sources, however, including ACSH trustee Dr. Paul Offit, chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and the inventor of a vaccine for the deadly rotavirus. Dr. Offit explained to PBS, There are hundreds of thousands of people in this country who cannot be vaccinated. They’re getting chemotherapy for their cancers, or they’re getting immunosuppressive therapy. They depend on those around them to be vaccinated.

People think, What’s the big deal? If you don’t want the vaccine, you just put yourself at risk, but you’re also putting vulnerable people at risk, says Stier. That’s the importance of herd immunity. Frontline did good job of getting the facts out. Of course, they had to give voice to the anti-vaccine crowd to show the controversy, but they also provided good information.