

# In defense of vaccines

By ACSH Staff — March 29, 2011

ACSH staffers were pleased to encounter a variety of pieces defending vaccines as a vital public health practice. A [book review](#) [1] in today's *The New York Times*, for instance, features an excellent work by informed consumer and *Vanity Fair* Contributing Editor Seth Mnookin. *The Times*' Dr. Abigail Zuger describes it as a "passionate defense of vaccination [that] may be just what the public needs." Mr. Mnookin recounts the advent of vaccination and points out that the Salk polio vaccine breakthrough in 1954 was followed by the infamous "Cutter Incident" — a poorly made vaccine batch infecting a number of patients, causing paralysis and death in a few. From then forward, Mr. Mnookin reflects on the stark difference between the public's response to vaccines in the 1950s compared to their recent reaction to the debunked measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine-autism link made infamous by Dr. Andrew Wakefield. The difference is that polio inoculation rates did not falter following the Cutter Incident because parents were still familiar with the frightening epidemics of paralytic polio. Dr. Zuger concludes, "Parents who want to play it safe, but are not altogether sure how, should turn with relief to this reasoned, logical and comprehensive analysis of the facts." We could not agree more!

Speaking of the vaccine-autism scare, today's issue of libertarian think-tank CATO's magazine *Regulation* includes a [must-read commentary](#) [2] that further repudiates Dr. Wakefield's so-called study linking the MMR vaccine to autism. After exposing the numerous weaknesses in the infamous clinical trial — which included only 12 subjects — Marni Soupcoff, deputy comment editor for Canada's *National Post*, writes: "Although the Wakefield mess caused the unnecessary resurgence of dangerous (sometimes even fatal) diseases...he has been carefully exposed as a scammer and the world has been reminded about the importance of evaluating evidence and avoiding relying on a single source. In a bizarre way, one disgraced and deceitful doctor may have made us all a little bit healthier."

"The fact that Dr. Wakefield was exposed not by the government or even the journal that published the study (*The Lancet*), but by a reporter, makes this fraud that much more shameful," laments ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. "Scientifically, the study was a mess, but *The Lancet's* editor, Richard Horton, decided not to concern himself with it. Shame on him for publishing this joke of a study. His irresponsibility and failure to accept and deal with the consequences is a major reason why we in public health still have to defend the miracle of vaccines."

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2011/03/29/in-defense-of-vaccines>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/29/health/views/29zuger.html>

[2] <http://www.cato.org/pubs/regulation/regv34n1/regv34n1-finalword.pdf>