

Parents, have no fear: Vaccines are here (to save the day)!

By ACSH Staff — June 10, 2011

A series of studies published in the journal *Health Affairs* offers both hopeful and discouraging news on the vaccine front. In one study by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and the Results for Development Institute, public health experts and scientists [predict](#) ^[1] that 6.4 million lives could be saved over the next ten years if 90 percent of the children in 72 of the world's poorest nations are vaccinated against diseases such as pneumococcal pneumonia, diphtheria, pertussis, measles, and rotavirus. The study, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, also found that such a program would save over \$151 billion in treatment costs and lost productivity over the next decade.

“This is a case where an investment in health care pays off huge dividends for those with the foresight to look down the road and see the vast benefits that vaccines have to offer,” adds ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross.

But just as things are looking up, another study published in *Health Affairs* [finds](#) ^[2] that out of 376 parents with young children surveyed, 77 percent still have concerns about vaccines. As part of a special series in *The Lancet*, lead author Heidi Larson from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine confirms these results, as she and her co-authors write that vaccines are “losing public confidence.”

What are some of the reasons people gave to justify their unfounded fears? One was attributed to the lack of familiarity with the diseases that vaccines protect against since most of those epidemics have basically disappeared. And that, Dr. Ross points out, is thanks to vaccines.

Others believe that the vaccine schedule may be too complex and are afraid that kids receive too many shots at once, but this has no basis in science or immunology, says Dr. Ross. “Kids are exposed to greater numbers of antigens on a daily basis,” he explains, “and their immune systems are not overwhelmed, nor would they be by a few concurrent inoculations.”

And, as the *Health Affairs* survey conducted by the CDC pointed out, 30 percent of parents still worry about a potential link between autism and the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine infamously proposed by Dr. Andrew Wakefield in a *Lancet* study the journal later retracted (ironic, perhaps, that now the same publication is underscoring the importance of vaccines in their most recent issue).

Of course, such a survey is fraught with potential biases and confounders, notes ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom: "If the survey went out to 3,000 parents and 376 responded, you're going to get a skewed response since those most averse to vaccines are far more likely to respond, while others will probably not bother."

Again, this is a scientifically baseless fear of vaccines, says ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. "All credible scientists believe they're major lifesaving tools, but sadly, facts are not always enough to allay people's concerns. Indeed, the rise of social media and the Internet further exacerbates the situation since quacks all over the country can get on their soapbox to promote their anti-vaccine agendas."

"Well," adds Dr. Ross, "while we may wish there could be a scientist nearby every time this happens, most scientists don't want to lower themselves by participating in such loaded debates with media-savvy quacks."

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