And Another 'W' for Vaccines

By Lila Abassi — May 12, 2016

On the list of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century, immunizations easily take the cake. As we have written before, since the introduction of the rotavirus vaccine, gastroenteritis, or “stomach flu” is now considered a thing of the past. Yet still somehow there exist fruit loops among us who have been able to confound the masses with agenda driven, anti-vaccine rhetoric.

To add to the mountain of available evidence in favor of vaccines, Public Health Ontario has published data in PLOS One indicating a 71 percent drop in hospitalizations since the introduction of the rotavirus vaccine in 2011.

Rotavirus is a highly contagious and ubiquitous virus that generally infects children between the ages of six months and two years. It had been previously established that this virus was the single most important cause of severe viral gastroenteritis in children globally. Typical symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, fever and in very severe cases dehydration and death. Like any other infection, children with suppressed immune systems are the most vulnerable.

In the Canadian case, prior to the introduction of the vaccine, one third of infected kids would visit with a doctor, 15 percent would go to an emergency room and 7 percent required hospitalization.

“We were very excited to see the significant impact of the rotavirus vaccine program. Hospitalizations in Ontario due to rotavirus infection were reduced by 71 percent and emergency department visits dropped by 68 percent,” according to Dr. Sarah Wilson, lead author of the study and a medical epidemiologist at Public Health Ontario and an adjunct professor at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES). “We expected to see a drop for babies and toddlers who were vaccinated under this program. What’s particularly interesting is we saw a drop even in older kids who were too old to receive the publicly-funded rotavirus vaccine, which means that protecting babies against illness also benefitted older children.”

To gather their data, researchers conducted a population-based study which searched for ICD-10 codes for viral infections over a span of eight years (2005–2013), which included a total of 864,262
infections. Data were broken down into the following categories: infants under 12 months, 12-23 months, 24-35 months, 3-4 years, and 5-19 years of age. Significant declines were observed in all age ranges including adults 65 years of age or older. The data clearly indicated herd benefits in protecting other members of the population, not just those typically infected (given the highly contagious nature of the illness).

Conspiracy theorists abound, but the data speak for themselves. Whether or not “big Pharma” is profiting from vaccines is not the issue. The bottom line is vaccines, such as the one for rotavirus, are invaluable in preserving and maintaining the health of the public. Vaccinate your children.

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