

NEWSLETTER

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ARE YOUR KIDS FULLY IMMUNIZED?

Some scary things are going on. Epidemics of childhood diseases we had already conquered with public health measures like vaccinations, hygiene, safe water and food, adequate housing, and public awareness campaigns are popping up. And not just in Africa or other third world sites but right here in the USA.

Cases of pertussis (whooping cough) in the US went from 1060 in 1976 to more than 25, 000 in 2004. Pertussis as a dreadful disease that not only can kill but nearly always makes the infected child miserable for a long time. And it is COMPLETELY PREVENTABLE.

Not only kids get pertussis. Half of the case reported in 2004 occurred in adolescents from 11-18 so that the American Academy of Pediatrics is recommending universal immunization of 11-year- olds and catch-up vaccination of older adolescents. Even old folks like me in the health professions, or teachers, or just ordinary grandparents can catch pertussis from an un-immunized and infected child. Yes we were all immunized but we are living longer and the protective effects of the shots we had many years ago wear off.

Why don't parents get their kids immunized? The old reasons still pertain: ignorance of the necessity, no money for health care, being overwhelmed with family or personal problems and unable to mobilize themselves and get their kids to the clinic.

But there is also a new reason: parents, often highly educated, decide they don't want their children immunized. Why? These parents think the vaccines are not safe and they do not wish to subject their children to what they consider is a risk. In one sense they are right, everything we do is risky. Putting your baby in the car carries risk even when baby is snug in an approved child restraint. Life itself is risky.

But the scariest and riskiest thing I can imagine is not immunizing our children. This means going back to the horrible child mortality rates of yesteryear, to watching our kids suffer through the morbidity of measles or whooping cough. Just as in Africa our kids will be so sick they are vulnerable to other diseases. Been listening to the news about avian flu? Believe me you don't want your child to be debilitated if and when bird flu that comes to your town.

Still worried about the risk of immunizations? Ask your doctors whether or not their own kids are immunized. Mine were and my grandchildren are . We doctors don't take chances with our own kids' lives.