

# Vaccination prevents sickness, disease

by Paul Swetzof  
for the Tundra Times

A few misguided attention getters are once again feeding misinformation to people which threaten the lives and health of our children.

In my view, whenever the lives of children are at stake, it is time to draw the line and say enough.

## OPINION

The same very few people who tried to convince us not to vaccinate our children against the Hepatitis B virus, because the vaccine was a plot by non-Natives to give our children AIDS, are trying to convince us that all vaccines are a plot to kill our children.

It should be noted that one of these same individuals who does not want us to vaccinate our children gets a flu vaccine for himself every year.

There is a word for this band of attention getters, and it is opportunists. Again, when they start messing with the physical safety of our children, they've gone too far.

The following common vaccines have saved the lives of thousands of infants and young children in Alaska, hundreds of thousands in all of the U.S. and millions worldwide.

Until a few years ago, a substantial percentage of Yup'ik children and young adults died or were permanently disabled from contracting the highly contagious Hepatitis B virus.

Entire villages were affected. A few years ago, a vaccine was developed which is almost 100 percent effective in protecting against the virus.

The result is that for the most part, only those individuals who have not been vaccinated become infected with the virus. The lives of hundreds of Yup'ik and other Alaska Native children and young adults have been saved.

Contrary to what some may hear from a strange group of people, there has never been a reported case of someone getting AIDS from the Hepatitis B vaccine, and in fact, it would now be impossible for this to occur since the vaccine does not consist of human plasma, but is a

synthetic.

Polio was a disease which killed and disabled thousands of children and was gaining a strong foothold in Alaska, until a vaccine was developed in the 1950's.

Every summer, parents all over the country would live in fear that their children would contract polio and die or be crippled. Today, thanks to the Polio vaccine, this disease is unheard of, infecting only those who have not had the vaccine.

Smallpox was a disease that over the years killed hundreds of thousands of people of all ages, all over the world. It was highly contagious.

Thanks to a vaccine that was developed and administered to newborns all over the world, this deadly killer has been eliminated and vaccinations are no longer required. There has not been a single reported case of smallpox — again thanks to the vaccine — in years.

The Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis (DTP) vaccine is administered to infants and young children on a scheduled basis, until they are about 5 years old, and after that age, most people get a booster shot (minus the Pertussis) every 10 years for the rest of their lives.

This combination vaccine has saved the lives of many thousands of infants and young children.

Diphtheria is a highly contagious disease which used to be widespread and greatly feared. It is passed to others by coughing and sneezing. It causes a painful throat infection which can block the airway and can result in paralysis or heart failure.

In the U.S. there used to be as many as 150,000 cases causing up to 10,000 deaths each year. The DTP vaccine has given our infants and young children protection from diphtheria.

Tetanus, also called lockjaw, infects the deep cuts or puncture wounds creating a powerful poison which can cause severe muscle spasms.

Four out of ten people who get tetanus die from it. The DTP vaccine and subsequent booster shots offer protection against tetanus.

Pertussis, also called whooping cough, is a bacterial infection of children and adults, but is most serious for infants and young children.

This disease causes harsh and painful coughing spells and can cause convulsions, brain damage and death. There used to be as many as 250,000 cases and 7,000 deaths every year.

This highly contagious disease is spread to others by coughing and sneezing. Because of the DTP vaccine, there are only three to four thousand reported cases of whooping cough in the entire U.S. each year.

While there are some common and harmless side effects, such as an ache at the injection site or a low fever, and very rare serious side effects primarily from the pertussis element of the DTP vaccine, the risk of death and disability from these diseases is so much greater than the discomfort of the vaccine that the choice is clear.

In the 1970's, many parents in Japan and Great Britain chose not to give their children the pertussis vaccine. The result was that thousands of children were hospitalized and many of those children, especially infants, died.

The statistics for those children contracting whooping cough are heart-breaking. Four out of five are hospitalized. One in five develops pneumonia. One in 40 has convulsions. One out of 240 develops disease of the brain or lasting brain damage. Death occurs in one out of 100 babies less than six months old.

The Hemophilus B vaccine (HIB) protects against a number of related and deadly illnesses in infants and young children. It protects against Meningitis, Epiglottitis, Septicemia, Cellulitis, Osteomyelitis, and Pericarditis.

Meningitis continues to infect about 12,000 children who are not vaccinated in the U.S. each year, killing about 5 percent of them and causing brain damage in one out of three infected children.

Epiglottitis is a potentially fatal infection that obstructs the airways.

Septicemia is an infection of the blood. Cellulitis is an infection of the skin and connective tissues of the body.

Osteomyelitis infects the bones and joints, and Pericarditis is an infection of the membranes surrounding the heart. Again, many thousands of infants and young children are alive today because of the HIB vaccine.

The Measles, Mumps, and Rubella

vaccine (MMR) protects infants and children against these highly contagious and serious diseases.

Measles, though often joked about, is a serious disease with potentially fatal complications, as many parents have learned the hard way.

Rubella, also known as German Measles, is often so mild that a person doesn't know he/she has it.

The problem with Rubella is that a pregnant woman who contracts the disease is at risk of having a child with birth defects, so girl babies who are vaccinated are protected against Rubella-related birth defects when they have children, and boy babies who are vaccinated won't be able to unknowingly contract the disease and spread it to pregnant women who are not vaccinated.

Mumps rarely presents a problem in childhood, but presents a serious problem for adults since it can cause severe complications such as sterility and deafness.

In years past, up to 50 percent of all newborns were expected to die or become disabled in the first year of life, primarily due to viral and bacterial infections.

Today, vaccinations have given our children protection from many deadly and disabling diseases.

Most children born today can expect to live healthy and full lives, thanks to the protections offered by vaccinations.

It's very easy to forget what it was like before these vaccinations were developed. For those who need help remembering, they need look no further than poor countries where children are not vaccinated, because it is in these places where viral and bacterial infections kill and disable a large percentage of the children.

I am the proud and happy father of a three-month-old baby. I would never give my child anything which would do more harm than good.

My boy has been receiving his vaccinations, as my other two children did before him.

My children are protected against the killer diseases which in the recent past routinely killed and crippled infants and young children around the world.

I urge you to protect your children, who are our future, by getting them vaccinated.