

Should Vaccinations be an Option?

By Cassandra Gomez

As Hudson's first birthday is approaching, his mom Bree is worrying about more than just planning a party. As Hudson is almost one, he has already had two rounds of immunizations and his scheduled visit for his third round is coming soon. She recalls the first visit for immunizations as a tough experience for both herself and her child. She states, "Seeing the nurse walk in with three long syringes and then being asked to hold him down while he was crying was overwhelming and not what I wanted my little baby boy to go through." Although she didn't like her child crying, the experience of getting an injection is not her real fear. Bree Gomez, a first time mother from the Orange County area, has had concerns about getting her child vaccinated as she has been reading different online accounts of mothers who claim that the vaccines is linked to causing autism. After the first two rounds of vaccines, Gomez says Hudson has gotten sick and asks, "Do I really want to or need to subject my healthy baby to getting sick for these shots?"

The answer to the question from a majority of medical experts is a resounding "yes." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend that healthy children get vaccinated against 14 diseases by age 2 along with an annual flu shot. Vaccinations have been argued to be one of the greatest public health achievements for the many lives that have been saved. The CDC "estimated that 732,000 American children were saved from death and 322 million cases of childhood illnesses were prevented between 1994 and 2014 due to vaccination" (vaccines.procon.org, 2018).

Even with the success of vaccinations, there are many parents in the country who delay or skip getting their children vaccinated. They cite religious or philosophical reasons in order to exempt. Some of the arguments that parents have used to opt out of vaccinations are as follows: 1. Vaccines can cause serious and fatal side effects 2. Vaccines contain harmful ingredients 3. The diseases these vaccinations target have essentially disappeared and 4. The government should not intervene in personal medical choices.

The government's goal is to have 80% of children ages 19 to 35 months up to date on their vaccinations as vaccines are able to more effectively prevent an outbreak when most of the population is covered. While this goal is almost achieved with a steady 76%, the more parents have been choosing to delay has contributed to outbreaks of infection. For example, the recent measles outbreak in Disneyland that resulted in at least seventy people contracted the contagious disease. Out of the seventy, only 5 patients had been vaccinated for that specific disease. Disneyland is a type of area to avoid taking children that have not been vaccinated because it attracts people from around the world who may come from countries where diseases like measles are still a problem. Although some people still contracted the disease after vaccinated, doctors explain this as a result of the patient only receiving one vaccination years ago. Decades ago, only one vaccination was required compared to now two measles vaccinations are suggested for children. This is just one recent case of an outbreak that could have been less in size if people were not allowed to opt out of vaccinations.

Even though there is no federal law mandating vaccinations, states are making strides in policy to increase the number vaccinated children. California changed its policy in 2015 with the passing of SB 277. Prior to the passing of this bill, parents were able to cite religious, personal or medical reasons to exempt their child from immunizations and still be able to enroll in school. With the bill, which was effective July 2016, religious and personal reasons were no longer an options and a medical excuse needed to be signed off by a doctor. California is one of few states that enacts this law as many states still allow religious exemption.

There is vast amount of research and study that goes into the creation of vaccinations before given to the public and parents should look into this before making their decision to exempt. There are many sites online that may exaggerate or fabricate stories of negative side effects in order to sway people's beliefs. However, that should not be taken as the full truth without looking at both sides of the argument. In the case of Bree, she has some reluctance with the idea of her child getting sick in order to be immune but she says, "I know that in the long run my child will be better protected and these vaccinations help him and others."