
Vaccinate your kid

PROGRESSIVE VIEWS

By Laura Bray
KENDALL COUNTY
DEMOCRATIC PARTY

In Oregon earlier this year, a six-year-old boy spent 45 days in the ICU after suffering a cut on his forehead.

Wait, what? From a cut?

Yes, a cut because his parents had refused to have him vaccinated for tetanus (and still refused after he was released from the ICU). The boy endured excruciating pain, muscle spasms, intubation and a tracheostomy before he finally recovered. Hospital bills (not counting rehab and air transport) were over \$800,000. For a completely preventable disease.

A long-debunked (and since-retracted) 1998 article in a British medical journal fueled the flames of the anti-vaccination movement. Pseudo-science, the Internet and general ignorance of science continue to encourage it.

Measles outbreaks appear in the news with increasing regularity. Once nearly eradicated due to vaccination (with the MMR vaccine), measles is an airborne contagion, spread through coughing and sneezing. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "measles virus can live for up to two hours in an airspace where an infected person coughed or sneezed. Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, up to 90 percent of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected." Other diseases preventable with vaccination include whooping cough and hepatitis A/B.

People with certain medical conditions (such as compromised immune systems from an organ transplant) have legitimate reasons that they cannot be vaccinated. Newborn infants obtain immunity from their mothers and aren't routinely vaccinated until 12 to 15 months. Parents who refuse to vaccinate their children endanger these vulnerable populations. Such a choice doesn't just have individual consequences.

"If people decide that they're going to do something that

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increases risk for the rest of us, then that's not right," says Dr. Jason Terk, a well-respected pediatrician in north Texas and a past-president of the Texas Pediatric Society.

An article in this newspaper on Feb. 22 stated, "Kendall County has the second-highest rate of so called 'conscientious exemptions' – unvaccinated children – in the state." Local physician Ben Stahl tells these parents "that the reason they have the luxury of deciding not to vaccinate is because the rest of our society is deciding to vaccinate."

This phenomenon is known in the medical community as "herd immunity," where a population has protection from a disease because a large proportion of that population has immunity. Stahl believes measles will crop up here and "it will be the consequences of a significant minority of our population deciding erroneously to not vaccinate against a once-eradicated disease."

Dr. Terk said, "Second to modern sanitation, [vaccines] are the most important public health achievement in the last 100 years." He has been ringing the warning bell about the consequences of increasing nonmedical exemptions. "Serious outbreaks of disease are likely to happen. People are going to get sick, and some people are going to die. And that's a preventable tragedy."

Our local representative to the Texas State House, Kyle Biedermann, supports and encourages the anti-vaccination group Texans for Vaccine Choice. This group "isn't just fighting for the freedom to skip childhood vaccines — but also to keep other parents from knowing that they did" by "oppos[ing] legislation like the Parents' Right to Know bill" (from an article in the April 2019 issue of Fort Worth magazine).

This bill would require "campus-level data about the percentage of exemptors at every school." It's a highly irresponsible position for Biedermann to take. (Please call him at 512-463-0325 to express your disagreement with his position.)

The harmful side effects of vaccine ingredients (such as mercury and formaldehyde) are overstated on social media and anti-vaccination websites. "You can't believe everything you read about harmful ingredients in vaccines," says the CDC. "For example, no vaccine contains, or has ever contained, even a molecule of antifreeze, although you would never know that after reading any of a dozen websites claiming that they do."

"Public health programs, such as immunization, are designed to protect the health of the public — that is, everybody," according to the CDC. "You don't wear a seatbelt because you expect to be in a serious accident; you wear it because you want to be protected in the unlikely event that you are. It's the same with vaccines."

All parents want to make the right health choices for their children. And nearly always, that "right health choice," supported by long-standing scientific and medical research, is immunization.

Laura Bray is deputy chairman of the Kendall County Democratic Party.