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<https://reachmd.com/programs/book-club/bits-from-bullets-and-brains-the-disregarded-value-of-vaccines/10719/>

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Bits from “Bullets and Brains”: The (Disregarded) Value of Vaccines

Dr. Wilner:

You’re listening to Book Club on ReachMD. I’m Dr. Andrew Wilner, and today I’ll be reviewing one of the more than 100 essays from my book, *Bullets and Brains*.

Today, I’d like to talk about chapter 16: “Oh My God, Vaccines Work.”. It was sparked by a *New England Journal* article that demonstrated that bacterial meningitis had decreased by 31% over the preceding 10 years, likely the result of vaccinations—for example, strains of streptococcus pneumonia that were in the vaccine, infections decreased by 92%. Conversely, meningitis from group B strep, for which there was no vaccine, had no change. The study reinforced what all physicians know: Vaccines are very effective in preventing illness. Vaccines, such as those against polio and tetanus, are truly modern miracles. According to the World Health Organization, vaccines prevent 2–3 million deaths a year. I also highlighted a new book by Paul Offit, Chief of Infectious Disease at Children’s Hospital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is author of *Deadly Choices: How the Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All*.

Now, 8 years later, the problem hasn’t gone away. In the year 2000, measles was supposedly eliminated from the United States, but recently, there was a measles outbreak near Portland, Oregon

with 44 confirmed cases, mostly children whose parents didn't bring them for immunization. In New York and New Jersey, there are more than 200 cases of measles. I had measles myself back in the day when there wasn't a vaccine. I was sick and missed a few days of school, but I was lucky. I didn't get pneumonia like 1 in 20 do or encephalitis like 1 in 1,000 do, and I didn't die like 1 in 1,000 do from measles. I've seen the damage that measles encephalitis can do in a patient with cognitive impairment and uncontrolled seizures, all because of childhood measles. It wasn't pretty. It's baffling that parents are willing to risk their children suffering and dying because emotional beliefs that are scientifically unfounded. The World Health Organization has named vaccine hesitancy one of the top 10 threats to global health.

Here is what I wrote in 2011. "It is ironic that modern science provides the power to eradicate epidemic infections like measles but irrational human behavior limits our ability to apply these tools, resulting in unnecessary morbidity and mortality for individuals and a costly societal burden."

Today, in 2019, I'm the proud father of a newborn, a beautiful little boy susceptible to many infectious diseases. We're going to the pediatrician next week for his first set of vaccines. I'm not happy that he'll be stuck by needles, but I am comforted that we live in an age where science has given us the tools to decrease his risk from hepatitis B, rotavirus, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Haemophilus influenza type B, and pneumococcus. I wish he could get his measles, mumps and rubella vaccine now as well, but we'll have to wait for him to be a little older to get those.

I plead with other parents to vaccinate their children so that their own children, as well as their neighbors and schoolmates, will not suffer the consequences of preventable infectious diseases, diseases that not only cause misery but sometimes lifelong morbidity and even death.

For more information on my book, *Bullets and Brains*, and to access other episode of this series, visit ReachMD.com/bookclub, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. For ReachMD, I'm Dr. Andrew Wilner. Thanks for listening.