National Immunization Awareness Month

August 21, 2017 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

August is National Immunization Awareness Month. Vaccines can prevent two liver diseases: hepatitis A and hepatitis B. Furthermore, if you prevent hepatitis B, you are also preventing liver cancer that is linked to hep B.

- Hepatitis A: Several states are in the midst of hepatitis A outbreaks. Nearly 500 new infections have been reported with at least 16 deaths. These outbreaks appear to be due to person-to-person contact and not contaminated food or water.
- Hepatitis B: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported an increase in new hepatitis B infections between 2014 and 2015. The highest rates are among people 30 to 50 years of age since most people younger than 30 were vaccinated as children.

Immunizations are one of the best defenses against diseases. Contrary to popular myths, vaccination does not give us the disease. It protects us.

If you believe that vaccines hurt rather than help people, and your mind is made up about this issue, then skip reading this article. If you are against immunization but open to reconsidering your position on the subject, then please continue reading.

How Vaccines Got a Bad Rep

In 1998, Andrew Wakefield, MD published a study in The Lancet suggesting that the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine could trigger autism. It turns out that Wakefield's data was fabricated. The Lancet eventually retracted the paper and Wakefield lost his medical license.

But the damage was done, and people continue to believe there is a link between autism and vaccines, even though numerous studies show that they don't. Vaccines save lives and they are covered by health insurance. Despite this, vaccination rates are still lower than what they need to be to protect us from preventable diseases. In the meantime, some babies that are too young to be immunized have been exposed to measles, mumps and rubella, and death has occurred in some cases.

Good luck getting people to change their minds. Studies show that people who are convinced of the danger of vaccines rarely change their opinions. There are a number of theories as to why this is, but it may just be that we have a hard time changing our minds. One study found that the act of trying to correct misinformation made us more likely to believe the false news rather than the correct version.

I must admit that I am quite frightened by the anti-vaccination stance. To me it’s like not believing that humans are contributing to climate change. Like religion, science should not be a political issue, but somehow it has become so. Have we forgotten that Galileo was arrested and tried for heresy because he proved that the earth was not the center of the universe? Galileo’s head is not on the block now, but our children’s lives are.

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