



Special thanks to the Immunization Program for developing the August Health Note

August is Immunization Awareness Month

Why a choice to get vaccinated matters to families and communities.

The stories shared on the California Immunization Coalition's "Why I Choose" immunization website (www.whyichoose.org) reveal that the motivations for getting vaccinated are varied. However, many people choose to be vaccinated because vaccinations protect not only them but **also** their families and communities.

- San Francisco Giants Catcher Bengie Molina shares "I guard home plates for the Giants. I guard my family's health by choosing to immunize."
- Elaine from San Diego shares "Not only does [immunization] directly benefit me, but I know that by doing my part in being immunized I am contributing to the larger effort to eliminate these diseases."

Surrounding our Communities and Loved Ones with Protection

Though these individuals may not be familiar with the terms community immunity or cocooning, they clearly understand the concepts - by getting vaccinated, you protect yourself and reduce the chance that others will be exposed to diseases that can be serious, even deadly.

Building a wall of protection

We can't spread immunity but by getting vaccinated, we do spread protection. The CDC defines community immunity as "a situation in which a sufficient proportion of a population is immune to an infectious disease (through vaccination and/or prior illness) to make its spread from person to person unlikely. Even individuals not vaccinated (such as newborns and those with chronic illnesses) are offered some protection because the disease has little opportunity to spread within the community."¹

Dr. Paul Offit, a well known vaccine advocate, describes this as building "a moat around a castle", noting that the more people protected through vaccination, the harder it is for disease to spread.²

Blanketing vulnerable individuals in protection

Cocooning, the strategy of vaccinating everyone around a vulnerable individual, protects those who cannot be vaccinated because they are too young or have a compromised immune system. For instance, infants are vulnerable to serious pertussis complications but are too young to be fully vaccinated against this disease. Thus, the CDC recommends that parents (including pregnant women), siblings, grandparents, and other contacts of infants be vaccinated against pertussis to avoid exposing them to this potentially deadly disease.³

While often used to protect infants, this approach can protect people of all ages. For instance, when your child is vaccinated, he or she also protects others who cannot receive certain vaccines: a classmate who has leukemia, a pregnant teacher who cannot receive certain vaccines until after she delivers, or a relative on chemotherapy.

These strategies work but only if enough people are vaccinated.

Vaccinating those who *can* receive vaccines has been shown to protect others who *cannot*. For instance, vaccinating children with pneumococcal vaccine led to a drop in pneumococcal disease in adults as well.⁴ A recent California study showed that vaccinating new mothers may reduce pertussis transmission to infants.⁵

However, these strategies only work when immunization rates remain high. A small but increasing number of parents are choosing to decline or delay vaccines for their children. This puts their children at risk for diseases that can be serious and can lead to outbreaks and increased disease activity in their community.

Prevention Matters: Take a step to protect our communities. Promote vaccinations.

- Share why you choose immunizations at www.whyichoose.org.
- Visit www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip for more information.

References

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