

The Vaccine Debate

by Aviva Werner

Lesson Plan

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Topic 5

Recent outbreaks of illnesses like measles have renewed the debate about whether parents should be required to vaccinate their children. In this lesson, students play a game of Outbreak to simulate the spread of disease with and without vaccine protection, study Jewish texts about the responsibility to protect other people's health, and create posters about their responsibilities to keep each other healthy.

Grades 7–10, 50 minutes



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Should vaccines be required for all healthy children? Why or why not?



OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand how vaccination prevents the spread of disease.
- Students will study Jewish texts about keeping others healthy.
- Students will brainstorm ways to keep other people healthy.



ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students: Have you ever received a shot/vaccine? What did you think about getting it? Did you hate it or was it an okay experience? At the time you got the shot, did you understand why you were getting it?
2. As a class, read the first three paragraphs of the article, stopping before “Opponents: Sovereign Over Our Own Bodies.” To ensure student comprehension, discuss:
 - What is measles?
 - What is a vaccine?
 - How many students in the class are vaccinated? Are any students not vaccinated? If so, why?
3. Explain that you will now play a game of Outbreak to simulate a measles outbreak. Clear a large area of the classroom for students to move around freely. Choose one student to play the part of the unidentified Disneyland vacationer with measles. (Give the student Mickey Mouse ears to wear, if possible.) The rest of the class should stand in the open space of the classroom. These students are not to move but should remain where they are standing.

- Blindfold the student with measles and give each of the other students a blindfold to hold. When you signal that the game has begun, the student should walk around the open area of the classroom with his or her arms spread out. When he touches or tags another student with his hands, that student becomes “infected” with the measles, puts on a blindfold, and begins walking around the classroom with arms spread out, too, infecting others.
 - Pause the game every five seconds or so to count how many students are infected. How long does it take for the whole class to come down with measles?
4. Explain that you will now play Outbreak again, but this time many students will be vaccinated against the measles. Hand each student a piece of paper. About three-quarters of the pieces of paper should say “Vaccinated,” while one-quarter should say “Unvaccinated.” Designate a new student to be the Disneyland vacationer (Mickey Mouse ears, blindfold). The unvaccinated students should receive blindfolds to hold. Begin the game again, with the measles student walking around the classroom with arms outstretched, tagging others.
 - This time, however, when a “vaccinated” student is tagged, they do not get measles but hold up their “Vaccinated” paper and continue standing in place without becoming sick. Only “unvaccinated” students become sick when tagged, get blindfolded, and begin walking around the room trying to tag others.
 - Pause the game every five seconds or so to count how many students are infected. Ask: What do you think would happen if more students were vaccinated? What do you think would happen if fewer students were vaccinated?
 5. Continue reading the remainder of the article. Discuss:
 - What are arguments in favor of universal vaccination?
 - What are arguments against universal vaccination?
 - How can our experience playing Outbreak inform our position on this issue?
 6. Divide students into groups of three or four to study the Jewish texts on the source sheet and discuss how might they relate to vaccination.
 7. Ask students again, now that they have learned these sources and discussed the topic, when they next are given a shot, will they think differently about it? In what way? What text or idea affected their perspective on vaccines the most?

The Vaccine Debate

When an unidentified Disneyland vacationer sneezed, a chain reaction of sickness was set off. The patient, as it turns out, was infected with measles, an extremely contagious virus. He or she infected staff and other vacationers at the California theme park, who then spread their germs in the airport on their way home from “the happiest place on earth.” Within two months of that first sneeze, the measles outbreak had infected 141 people in seventeen states.

MEASLES AND VACCINES

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), measles is the “most deadly of all childhood rash/fever illnesses.” Its primary symptoms are fever, rash, red eyes, and coughing, but complications of the illness include hearing loss, pneumonia, swelling of the brain, and even death in some cases. While infection is preventable with a common childhood vaccine (MMR, which vaccinates against measles, mumps, and rubella), increasing numbers of parents are opting out of their children’s immunizations.

The CDC recommends that children receive twenty-eight doses of ten different vaccines by the time they reach age eight. No federal laws require parents to vaccinate their children, although every state requires certain immunizations for entrance into public school. However, many states allow exemptions from this requirement for religious, medical, or philosophical reasons.

*Supporters
of vaccination for
all healthy children point
out that vaccines
save lives.*

OPPONENTS: SOVEREIGN OVER OUR OWN BODIES

Parents who choose to exempt their children from the vaccine requirement often cite a 1998 British study that linked autism to vaccination. The study has since been proven false and was retracted. Numerous subsequent studies have established that there is no link between vaccines and autism, so this argument is flawed.

Parents against vaccination also worry about possible vaccine side effects, such as seizures, paralysis, and even death. Though these reactions are extremely rare and statistically insignificant, some parents are concerned nonetheless. In addition, many parents bristle at the idea of other people intervening in their parenting choices. They assert that the government should leave personal medical decisions to parents, who alone are responsible for deciding what is best for their children. “Freedom over one’s physical person is the most basic freedom of all, and people in a free society should be sovereign over their own bodies,” said Ron Paul, a physician and former presidential candidate.

(article continues on next page) →

PROPOSERS: DISEASE IS PREVENTABLE

Supporters of vaccination for all healthy children point out that vaccines save lives. According to the CDC, an estimated 332 million cases of childhood illness were prevented between 1994 and 2014 because children were vaccinated.

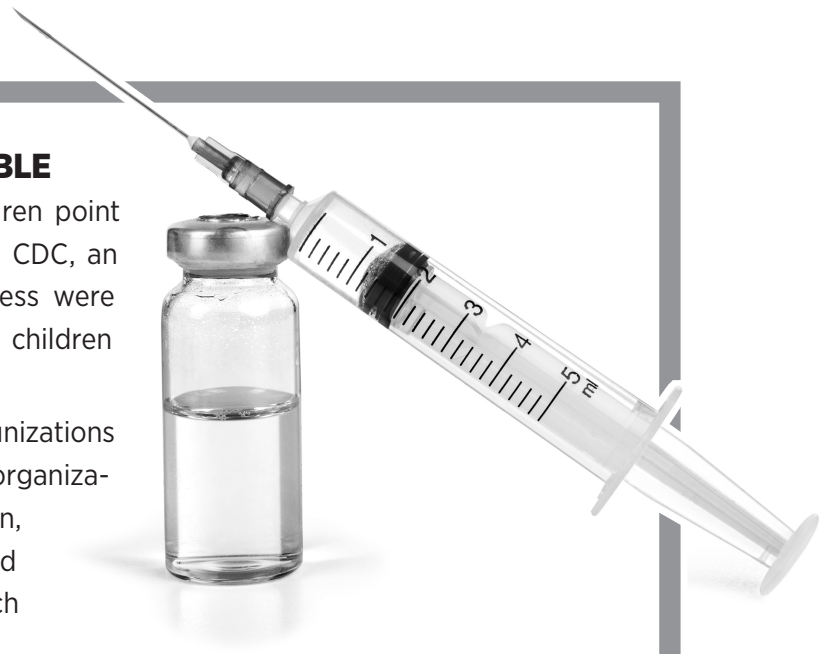
They also argue that bad reactions to immunizations are extremely rare, and that all major medical organizations—the CDC, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the World Health Organization, among many others—vouch for the safety of vaccines.

Furthermore, refusing to vaccinate healthy children puts other members of the community at risk. Children who are too young to be vaccinated or who are in poor health (due to chemotherapy, for example) must rely on “herd immunity.” When most of the population (or “herd”) is vaccinated, a disease outbreak is unlikely. This protects those children who cannot be vaccinated. But if not enough members of the community are immunized, these children are no longer protected.

Guarding one’s health is a Jewish value called *sh’mirat haguf*. It encourages us to take preventive measures, such as exercise, a good diet, even vaccinations, to prevent illness. Likewise, the mitzvah to not stand idly by while another suffers suggests a communal responsibility to prevent those around us from getting sick and to decrease the risk of diseases spreading.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Should vaccines be required for all healthy children? Why or why not?



The Vaccine Debate

Source Sheet

–1–

One who can save another person's life, but fails to do so, has transgressed a negative commandment, as it says, "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is shed." [Leviticus 19:16]).

(Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Rotze'ach Ush'mirat Hanefesh 1:14)

–2–

One should flee from a city when a plague is in the city. One should leave the city at the outset of the plague and not at its completion.

(Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 116:5)

–3–

A person is forbidden to harm oneself or another.

(Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Chovel UMazik 5:1)

–4–

To preserve one human life is to preserve the entire world.

(Avot d'Rabbi Natan 31:2)

–5–

When you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone should fall.

(Deuteronomy 22:8)