

15 November 2014

Dear Editor,

I recently read the article 'Fear over rise in no-jab kids' (November 15, 2014) and felt compelled to respond. It has been over four years since the West Australian wrote an article about our family's decision to be vaccine free (Fletcher jab free by Mum's choice, May 28, 2010). The public backlash following the article was hostile, but our friends (mother's group included) remain close, despite some of their own choices to vaccinate. Since the article was published, we have moved back to the United States for work where our son, still vaccine free with the support of our pediatrician, attends kindergarten. Fletcher attends school in a state with the highest non-vaccination rate in the country, and a county with a vaccination rate less than 90%. Many pro-vaccination people would argue that herd immunity is lost and that our school is at a significant risk for an infectious disease epidemic. I'm happy to report that our experience says otherwise. Our school community is vigilant about our children's health. Last year, a classmate who is vaccinated contracted measles, yet not one other child in the school became ill. (Apparently, the classmate was among that unlucky vaccinated group that experience vaccine failure. Unfortunately, the source of the exposure was never identified by the vaccinated child's parents.) I write this letter to share with curious parents strategies of what can be done to keep our children healthy in environments where many children are not vaccinated.

1) Encourage breastfeeding for as long as possible. While none of the kids in our son's class are still breastfeeding at the age of 5, many were breastfed beyond the recommended one year and they have younger siblings who still are breastfeeding. Our school actively supports and encourages any mother to breastfeed on demand by providing the community space and privacy to do so as needed.

2) Maintain a healthy diet. Our school families bring their own lunches and snacks to school. The majority of lunches are certified organic, locally grown, fruits and vegetables with protein. No candy or sugary drinks are allowed. Many students take probiotics a month before the school year starts and make sure that they receive the necessary daily amount of vitamin D to support a strong immune system.

3) Maintain a healthy school environment. We do this by washing hands frequently and by using systematic cleaning procedures with green cleaning products. This means that our community does not utilize cleaning products with volatile organic compounds known to cause chronic health problems like respiratory illnesses.

4) Get good sleep. Kids and adults! Don't skip naps, make bed times earlier.

5) Be on top of illness. Our school is a co-operative, so parents are regularly scheduled to help teach in the classroom. This means that when anyone (parent, student, younger siblings) shows signs of illness (fever, vomiting, etc), they remain quarantined and do not enter the school. If a child has an extremely high fever or shows little sign of improvement after three days, they are taken to the doctor for treatment. Oftentimes, treatment means more rest and fluids.

These are simple things that make a big difference. As the wintry flu season approaches the U.S., I am reminded of the experience of Saba Rose, who is the same age as our Fletcher, and the many other children who experience irreversible negative effects of vaccinations. I am reminded of the inadequacies of the vaccine adverse event reporting systems in Australia and the U.S. I am reminded of the conflicts of interest between public health officials, vaccine researchers, and vaccine manufacturers. And we will remain vaccine free.

Sincerely,
Sarah Chivers
Portland, Oregon