




The Herd Immunity Conundrum

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According to the CDC, each year nearly 900,000 Americans die prematurely from five leading causes of death (heart disease, cancer, unintentional accidents, stroke and chronic lower respiratory diseases). Within those deaths there is an estimated 20-40 percent that could have been prevented with simple, basic lifestyle changes. Yet, it's extremely rare to hear about anyone cruelly attacking others over social media concerning the prevention of these types of deaths. My educated guess is, it's far easier to defend a shot that takes seconds to inject instead of persuading someone to make a lifestyle change that most likely you are not willing to make yourself.

Fact: Genetics load the gun, vaccines are the safety but ultimately environment/lifestyle pulls the trigger.

Currently, the average American spends around \$11,000 annually on healthcare costs. Therefore, during this time of year when social media is flooded with complete strangers rallying together to crucify others over whether to have a shot or not, I become incredibly frustrated. It's hard for me to fathom how people, who usually aren't pillars of health, arm themselves with googled medical advice and sit behind a keyboard completely ripping another human, another parent to pieces...all in the name of protecting the herd!

Therefore, as the vaccine debate gets increasingly heated this season, it is imperative to understand the theory of herd immunity. To prevent the spread of disease, everyone in the community needs to be immune to said disease(s). If a high enough proportion of individuals in a population are immune, the majority will protect the few susceptible people because the pathogen is less likely to find a susceptible person. And this theory works well but only as long as we have a limited number of susceptible people.

Unfortunately, with the increase in chronic disease caused by lifestyle choices, the pool of susceptible people is on the rise. Chronic diseases lower your immunity. Lowered immunity equals less people who could effectively receive a vaccine. Hence, weakening the overall immunity of the herd. This is important to understand because in the debate over vaccines we tend to focus on diseases that have been eradicated in the past yet, if the overall immunity in the pool continues to drop we are leaving the door wide open for far worse diseases to develop. Therefore, we must become proactive in strengthening the herd immunity by limiting the number of susceptible people. This is a vital fact lost on both sides of the debate – Mandating vaccines works if you have enough strong immune systems and on the flip side, choosing to not have vaccines works only if there are enough strong immune systems.

It is time to stop fighting each other and redirect our energy towards the importance of making lifestyle changes and viewing vaccines more as a fail-safe. Now before you go declaring I'm crazy, think about a machine you depend on daily...a car. The computer in a car has a fail-safe installed to minimize or prevent catastrophic damage. Yet, with safe driving, routine maintenance and quality fuel, the likelihood that you will ever need that fail-safe to kick in, is relatively small. Same with human bodies. Our bodies are machines, only with less metal and squishier, complex parts. We choose to receive vaccines to prevent the event of a breakdown or malfunction. Which isn't that what disease does to the body? It creates a breakdown or malfunction to our overall health.

Fact of the matter is, despite phenomenal advances in modern medicine, there isn't a hundred percent safeguard against disease or suffering caused by illness due to genetics. Even with that reality and the availability of vaccines, the common factor agreed upon by the entire medical community (traditional and alternative) is: the most effective way to prevent disease from reaching epidemic levels is to decrease chronic disease through lifestyle changes. Therefore, until you are ready to make positive lifestyle changes yourself, sitting behind a computer degrading a stranger from a keyboard is doing nothing to protect the herd.

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