

The Impact of Vaccines on Mortality Decline Since 1900—According to Published Science

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Since 1900, there’s been a 74% decline in mortality rates in developed countries, largely due to a marked decrease in deaths from infectious diseases. How much of this decline was due to vaccines? The history and data provide clear answers that matter greatly in today’s vitriolic debate about vaccines.

Since 1900, the mortality rate in America and other first-world countries has declined by roughly 74%, creating a dramatic improvement in quality of life and life expectancy for Americans.

The simple question: “How did this happen?”

Why did the mortality rate decline so precipitously? If you listen to vaccine promoters, the answer is simple: vaccines saved us. What’s crazy about this narrative is how easy it is to disprove, the data is hiding in plain sight. The fact that this easily-proven-false narrative persists, however, tells us a lot about the world we live in, and I hope will encourage parents to reconsider the veracity of many of the narratives they’ve been fed about vaccines, and do their own primary research.

1970, Dr. Edward H. Kass

Standing before his colleagues on October 19, 1970, Harvard’s [Dr. Edward H. Kass](#) gave a speech to the annual meeting of the Infectious Diseases Society of America that would likely get him run out of this same profession today. At the time, Dr. Kass was actually the President of the organization, which made the things he had to say about vaccines and their impact on the reduction in American mortality rates even more shocking, at least by today’s standards. Forty-eight years after Dr. Kass’ speech, vaccines have taken on a mythological status in many corners of our world, hyped up by the people who benefit the most from their

use. Of course vaccines saved the world. Of course every child should get every vaccine. If you don't vaccinate, you will enable the return of deadly childhood diseases. If you don't vaccinate, your child will die. If you question vaccines, even a little, you're an "anti-vaxxer" who should be shunned and dismissed!

But what if most of the history about the role vaccines played in declining mortality isn't even true?

In his famous speech, Dr. Kass took his infectious disease colleagues to task, warning them that drawing false conclusions about WHY mortality rates had declined so much could cause them to focus on the wrong things. As he explained:

"...we had accepted some half truths and had stopped searching for the whole truths. The principal half truths were that medical research had stamped out the great killers of the past—tuberculosis, diphtheria, pneumonia, puerperal sepsis, etc.—and that medical research and our superior system of medical care were major factors extending life expectancy, thus providing the American people with the highest level of health available in the world. That these are half truths is known but is perhaps not as well known as it should be."

Dr. Kass then shared some eye-opening charts with his colleagues. I'm trying to imagine a President of the Infectious Diseases Society of America sharing one of these charts today at a meeting of public health officials. I picture someone turning the power off for the room where he's presenting and then he gets tackled and carried off the stage...here's the first example of a chart Dr. Kass shared in 1970:

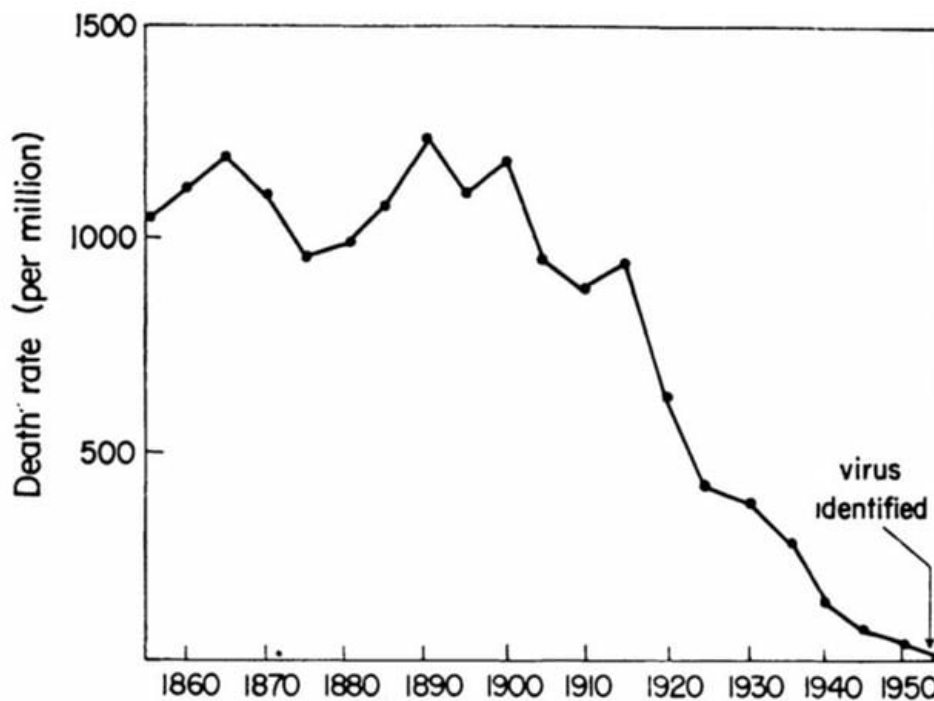


Figure 5. Mean annual death rate from measles in children under 15 years of age, England and Wales.

But wait a minute, Dr. Kass' chart doesn't even include the measles vaccine...what gives?

Well, in 1970, the measles vaccine was just beginning to be rolled out, and as you can clearly see, measles had long since experienced a dramatic decline in mortality. With Pertussis (Whooping Cough), he produced a similar chart:

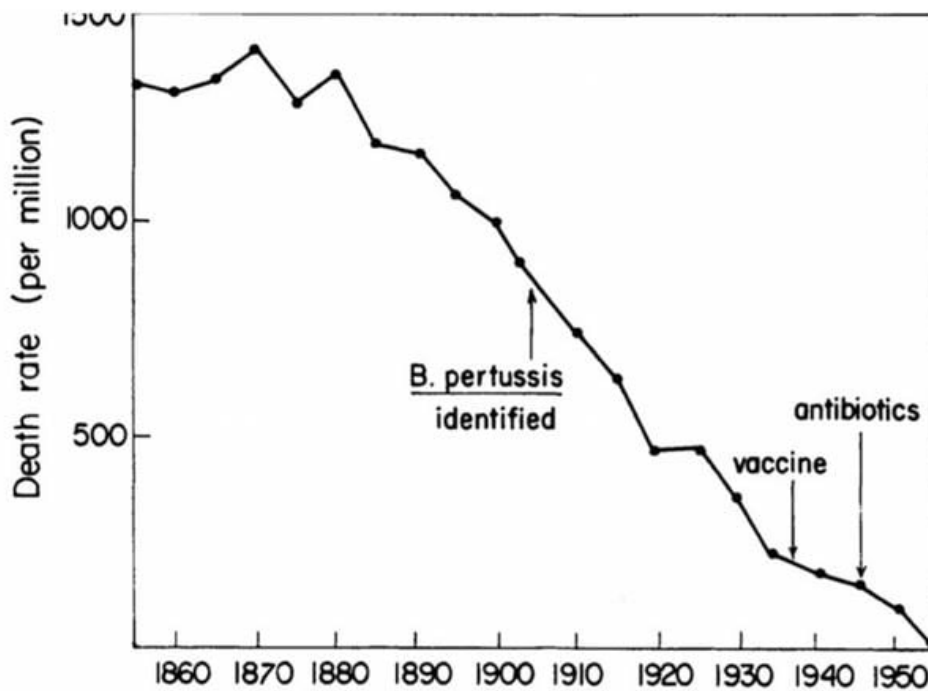


Figure 4. Mean annual death rate from whooping cough in children under 15 years of age, England and Wales.

In this case, you can actually see when the Pertussis vaccine was introduced. He also showed a chart for Scarlett Fever, which furthers the confusion about the role of vaccines, because there's never been a Scarlett Fever vaccine, and yet the chart of a huge decline in mortality from Scarlett Fever looks very similar to measles and pertussis:

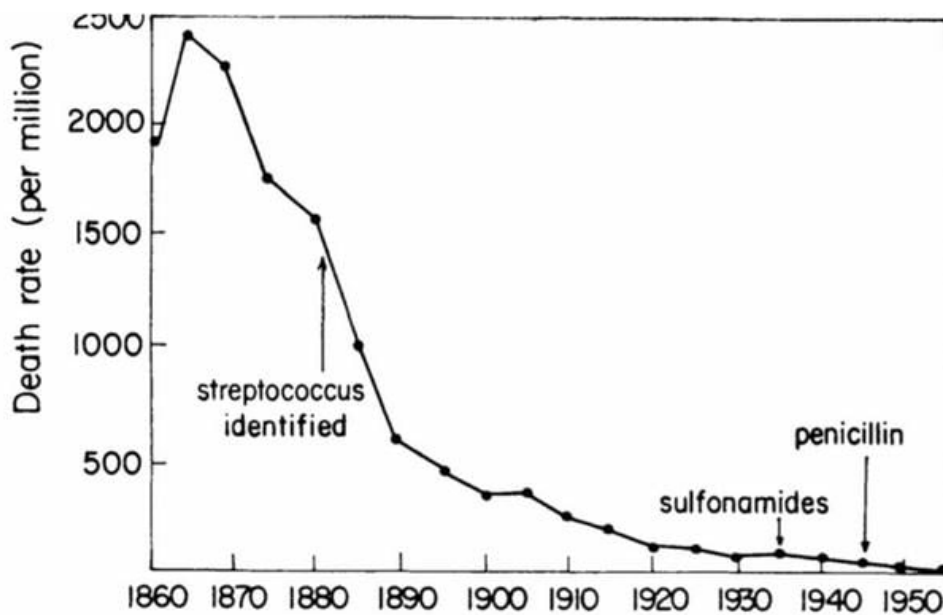


Figure 3. Mean annual death rate from scarlet fever in children under 15 years of age, England and Wales.

What's the point?

Dr. Kass was trying to make a simple point to his colleagues, but one with profound implications for public health. His point was so important, I'm going to quote him in really big font to try and drive it home:

"This decline in rates of certain disorders, correlated roughly with socioeconomic circumstances, is merely the most important happening in the history of the health of man, yet we have only the vaguest and most general notions about how it happened and by what mechanisms socioeconomic improvement and decreased rates of certain diseases run in parallel."

Dr. Kass pled with his colleagues to be open to understanding WHY infectious diseases had declined so dramatically in the U.S. (as well as other first world countries). Was it nutrition? Sanitary methods? A reduction in home crowding? (We've since learned the answer to all three questions is, "Yes.") He encouraged his colleagues to be careful not to jump to conclusions prematurely and to maintain objectivity and "devote ourselves to new possibilities."

Luckily for us, Dr. Kass' speech that day has been saved for posterity, as it was printed in its entirety in a medical journal. In fact, it's a journal that Dr. Kass himself founded, *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, and his speech is called, "[Infectious Disease and Social Change.](#)" There are a number of things about Dr. Kass' speech that I found breathtaking, especially given that he was the President of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. Namely:

1. He never referred to vaccines as "mankind's greatest invention" or one of the other many hyperbolic ways vaccines are described all the time by vaccine promoters in the press today. Vaccines weren't responsible for saving "millions of lives" in the United States, as Dr. Kass well knew.

2. In fact, he never gave vaccines much credit AT ALL for the developed world's dramatic mortality decline. Which makes sense, because none of the data he had would have supported that view. Which made me wonder, "has anyone tried to put the contribution of vaccines to the decline in human mortality in the 20th century in context?" Said differently, is there any data that measures exactly how much impact vaccines had in saving humanity? Yes, indeed there is. Read on.

1977: McKinlay & McKinlay: The most famous study you've never heard of

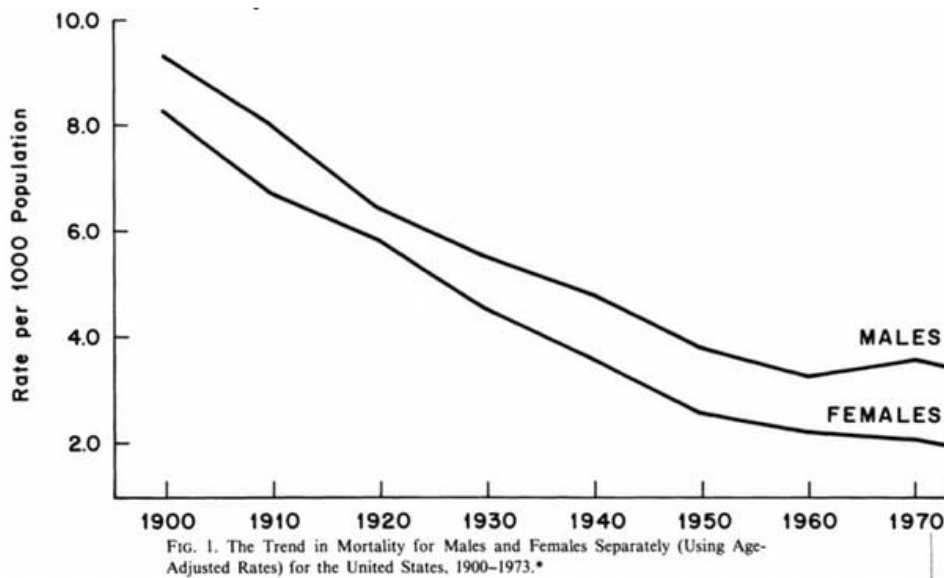
It won't be the world's easiest read, but I hope you take the time to read every word. In 1977, Boston University epidemiologists (and husband and wife) John and Sonja McKinlay published the seminal work on the role vaccines (and other medical interventions) played in the massive decline in mortality seen in the twentieth century, that 74% number I talked about in my opening paragraph. Not only that, but their study warned against the very behavior we are now seeing in the world of vaccines. Namely, they warned that a group of profiteers might take more credit for the results of an intervention (vaccines) than the intervention deserves, and then use those fake results to create a world where their product must be used by everyone. Seriously, they predicted that this would happen. (It's worth noting that the McKinlay Study used to be required reading at every medical school.)

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Published in 1977 in *The Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, the McKinlay's study was titled, ["The Questionable Contribution of Medical Measures to the Decline of Mortality in the United States in the Twentieth Century."](#) The study clearly proved, with data, something that the McKinlay's acknowledged might be viewed by some as medical "heresy." Namely:

"that the introduction of specific medical measures and/or the expansion of medical services are generally not responsible for most of the modern decline in mortality."

By "medical measures," the McKinlay's really meant ANYTHING modern medicine had come up with, whether that was antibiotics, vaccines, new prescription drugs, whatever. The McKinlay's 23-page study really should be read cover to cover, but in a nutshell the McKinlay's sought to analyze how much of an impact medical interventions (antibiotics, surgery, vaccines) had on this massive decline in mortality rates between 1900 and 1970:



Here are some of the major points their paper made:

- 92.3% of the mortality rate decline happened between 1900 and 1950 [before most vaccines existed]
- Medical measures “appear to have contributed little to the overall decline in mortality in the United States since about 1900—having in many instances been introduced several decades after a marked decline had already set in and having no detectable influence in most instances.”

And, here’s the two doozies...

The paper makes two points that I really want to highlight, because they are so important. The first one concerns vaccines. They write:

“Even if it were assumed that this change was entirely due to the vaccines, then only about one percent of the decline following interventions for the diseases considered here could be attributed to medical measures. Rather more conservatively, if we attribute some of the subsequent fall in the death rates for pneumonia, influenza, whooping cough, and diphtheria to medical measures, then perhaps 3.5 percent of the fall in the overall death rate can be explained through medical intervention in the major infectious diseases considered here. Indeed, given that it is precisely for these diseases that medicine claims most success in lowering mortality, 3.5 percent probably represents a reasonable upper-limit estimate of the total contribution of medical measures to the decline in mortality in the United States since 1900.”

In plain English: of the total decline in mortality since 1900, that 74% number I keep mentioning, vaccines (and other medical interventions like antibiotics) were responsible for somewhere between 1% and 3.5% of that decline. Said differently, at least 96.5% of the decline (and likely more than that since their numbers included ALL medical interventions, not ONLY vaccines) had nothing to do with vaccines.

You don’t get to say you saved humanity if, at most, you were responsible for 3.5% of the decline in mortality rates since 1900 (and probably closer to 1%).

And then the McKinlay's wrote something that made me laugh out loud, because it's the thing we are seeing every day in today's vaccine-hyped world:

“It is not uncommon today for biotechnological knowledge and specific medical interventions to be invoked as the major reason for most of the modern (twentieth century) decline in mortality. Responsibility for this decline is often claimed by, or ascribed to, the present-day major beneficiaries of this prevailing explanation.”

Sound familiar?

2000: the CDC puts the final nail in the coffin

In 1970, Dr. Kass raised the idea that public health officials need to be careful to not give the wrong things credit for the twentieth century's massive mortality rate decline in the developed world. In 1977, Drs. McKinlay & McKinlay put data around Dr. Kass' ideas, and showed that vaccines (and other medical interventions) were responsible for between 1-3.5% of the total decline in mortality since 1900. In 2000, CDC scientists reconfirmed all this data, but also provided more insight into the things that actually have led to declines in mortality.

Published in September 2000 in the journal *Pediatrics* and titled, “Annual Summary of Vital Statistics: Trends in the Health of Americans During the 20th Century,” epidemiologists from both Johns Hopkins and the Centers for Disease Control reaffirmed what we had already learned from McKinlay and McKinlay:

“Thus vaccination does not account for the impressive declines in mortality seen in the first half of the century...nearly 90% of the decline in infectious disease mortality among US children occurred before 1940, when few antibiotics or vaccine were available.”

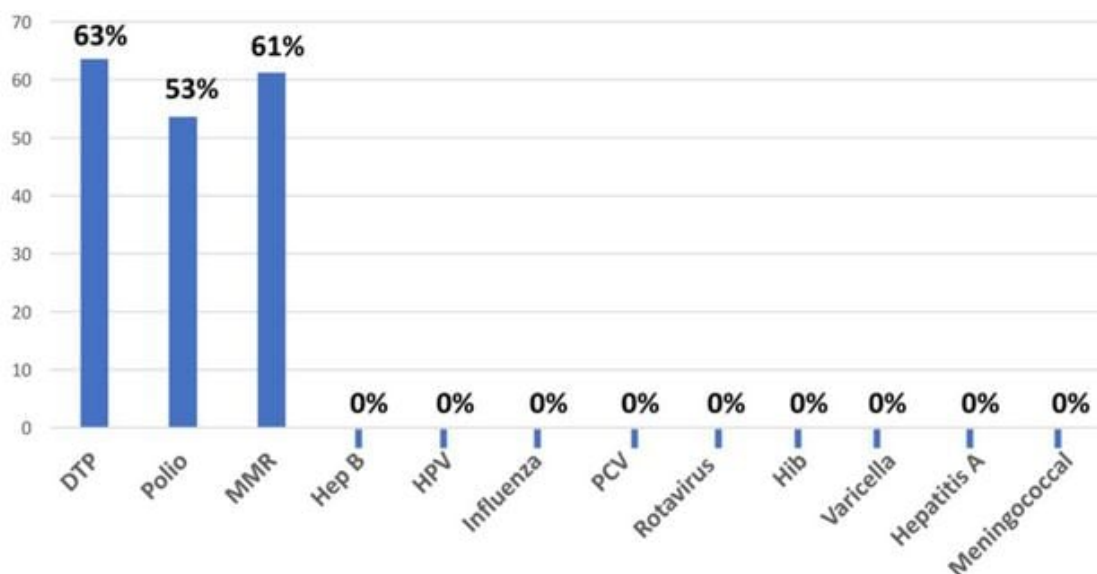
The study went on to explain the things that actually were responsible for a massive decline in mortality:

“water treatment, food safety, organized solid waste disposal, and public education about hygienic practices.” Also, “improvements in crowding in US cities” played a major role. Clean water. Safe food. Nutrition. Plumbing. Hygiene. These were the primary reasons mortality declined so precipitously. At least according to the data and published science.

Recent history

I get really strong reactions when I share this chart, compiled from CDC data:

Vaccination Rates, 1985 United States



Source: Centers for Disease Control, **Vaccine Coverage Levels – United States, 1962-2009**
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/appendices/G/coverage.pdf>

This chart is compiled from this [dataset](#) provided by the CDC. You can see that nine vaccines we give children today didn't even exist in the mid-1980s. Moreover, the vaccination rates for the three vaccines that did exist were hovering near 60% or less as late as the mid-1980s. Today, vaccination rates are all well north of 90% for American children. I think it's fair to ask, "why so much panic"? If you think about this chart for long enough, it makes you realize how silly the oft-invoked notion of "herd immunity" really is, since we obviously couldn't have been anywhere near vaccine-induced herd immunity in the mid-1980s. In fact, we're really no closer today, because adult vaccination rates remain so low, and vaccines wane over time.

Why the truth matters

As McKinlay and McKinlay warned, if the wrong intervention (like vaccines) is singled out as the reason Americans and the rest of the first world experienced such a dramatic decrease in mortality in the 20th century, that misinformation can be abused to do things like:

- Rapidly expanding the number of vaccines given to children
- Browbeating parents who chose to follow a different vaccine schedule and making them feel guilty
- Making vaccines mandatory
- Speaking about vaccines in such reverential terms that even questioning them (like I'm doing in this article) is viewed as sacrilegious and irresponsible.
- And, denying that vaccines injuries happen at high rates, to keep the whole machine moving in the right direction. (By the way, the best guess of vaccine injury rate is about 2% of people who receive vaccines, according to [this study commissioned and paid for by the CDC](#) when they actually automated the tracking of vaccine injuries. The "one in a million" figure thrown around by vaccine promoters is simply an unsupportable lie.)

Africa, and other third world countries

Vaccine promoters will often quote statistics about present-day deaths from infectious diseases that sound deeply alarming. Using examples of a disease like measles, they might explain how many children still die from measles every year, and therefore its gravely important that EVERY American parent vaccinate their child for measles. Of course, what they don't mention is that these infectious disease deaths are happening in places that still have quality of life conditions akin to American children of the early 1900s. Poor nutrition. No plumbing or refrigeration. Bad hygiene practices. Crowded living conditions. All the things that ACTUALLY impacted the mortality rate the most haven't yet been addressed in certain parts of Africa and other third world countries, and JUST implementing vaccines won't change the facts. This was Dr. Kass' point in the first place: know what actually led to the mortality rate decline, and do more of that!

In fact, we now have some data that shows vaccinating children living in situations where they have poor nutrition and lack of sanitation can actually do more harm than good:

The "Aaby Study"



Published in the peer-reviewed journal EBioMedicine in 2017, the study is titled, "[The Introduction of Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis and Oral Polio Vaccine Among Young Infants in an Urban African Community: A Natural Experiment.](#)" Researchers from the Research Center for Vitamins and Vaccines, Statens Serum Institut (Denmark), and Bandim Health Project looked closely at data from the West African nation of Guinea-Bissau. The scientists in this study closely explored the concept of NSEs, "nonspecific effects" of vaccines, which is a fancy way of saying vaccines may make a child more susceptible to other infections. They found that the data for African children who had been vaccinated with the DTP vaccine:

"was associated with 5-fold higher mortality than being unvaccinated. No prospective study has shown beneficial survival effects of DTP. . . . DTP is the most widely used vaccine. . . . All currently available evidence suggests that DTP vaccine may kill more children from other causes than it saves from diphtheria, tetanus, or pertussis. Though a vaccine protects children against the target disease, it may simultaneously increase susceptibility to unrelated infections."

In lay terms, this means that giving an African child the DTP vaccine may make the child sick from other infections. It appears that in Africa, the living conditions are more important than the vaccine (as you would very much expect from Dr. Kass' and the Drs. McKinlay's work), and the DTP vaccine did indeed do more harm than good. (It's worth noting that Dr. Aaby was a highly regarded vaccine researcher until he published this study in 2017. It's my understanding that he has since lost his funding sources. Welcome to today's world of vaccine "science.")

Every Second Child

We have another real world example of this phenomenon from the late 1970s. Dr. Archie Kalokerinos made a simple discovery, as he explains:

"At first it was just a simple clinical observation. I observed that many infants, after they received routine vaccines like tetanus, diphtheria, polio, whooping cough or whatever, became ill. Some became extremely ill, and in fact some died. It was an observation, It was not a theory. So my first reaction was to look at the reasons why this happened. Of course I found it was more likely to happen in infants who were ill at the time of receiving a vaccine, or infants who had been ill recently, or infants who were incubating an infection. Of course in the early stages of incubation there is no way whatsoever that anyone can detect the disease. They turn up later on. Furthermore, some of the reactions to the vaccines were not those that were listed in the standard literature.

They were very strange reactions indeed. A third observation was that with some of these reactions which normally resulted in death I found that I could reverse them by giving large amounts of vitamin C intramuscularly or intravenously. One would have expected, of course, that the authorities would take an interest in these observations that resulted in a dramatic drop in the death rate of infants in the area under my control, a very dramatic drop. But instead of taking an interest their reaction was one of extreme hostility. This forced me to look into the question of vaccination further, and the further I looked into it the more shocked I became. I found that the whole vaccine business was indeed a gigantic hoax. Most doctors are convinced that they are useful, but if you look at the proper statistics and study the instance of these diseases you will realise that this is not so."

Dr Kalokerinos also said something in 1995 that it appears Dr. Aaby's study was able to corroborate in 2017:

"And if you want to see what harm vaccines do, don't come to Australia or New Zealand or any place, go to Africa and you will see it there."

We actually knew the truth in the early 1900s, even before the rapid decline in mortality. Well ahead of his time, Englishman John Thomas Biggs was the sanitary engineer for his town of Leicester and had to actively respond to outbreaks of smallpox. He quickly learned that the public health outcomes from sanitation *vastly outweighed* the impact of vaccination (where he saw dramatic vaccine injury and ineffectiveness). He wrote a definitive work in 1912, [Leicester: Sanitation versus Vaccination](#). More than one hundred years ago, Mr. Biggs discovered what the CDC reaffirmed in 2000: Nothing protects from infectious disease like proper sanitation. He explained:

“Leicester has furnished, both by precept and example, irrefutable proof of the capability and influence of Sanitation, not only in combating and controlling, but also in practically banishing infectious diseases from its midst. . . . A town newly planned on the most up-to-date principles of space and air, and adopting the “Leicester Method” of Sanitation, could bid defiance not to small-pox only, but to other infectious, if not to nearly all zymotic, diseases.”

Dr. Andrew Weil, the oft-quoted celebrity doctor, reenforces the point, explaining that “medicine has taken credit it does not deserve for some advances in health. Most people believe that victory over the infectious diseases of the last century came with the invention of immunizations. In fact, cholera, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough, and the others were in decline before vaccines for them became available — the result of better methods of sanitation, sewage disposal, and distribution of food and water.”

Finally

U.S. DISEASES BY THE NUMBERS: **BEFORE** VACCINES

Vaccines were gradually introduced between 1945 and 1995. Have you ever wondered just how many people died or suffered permanent harm from each disease before the vaccine was implemented?

DISEASE NAME (VACCINE INTRODUCED)	FATALITY/HARM (BEFORE THE VACCINE)	POPULATION NOT HARMED (BEFORE THE VACCINE)
POLIO (1955)	1 in 100,000 (fatalities/paralysis) <i>people in the population</i>	99.999%
MEASLES (1963)	1 in 500,000 <i>people in the population</i>	99.9998%
PERTUSSIS (late 1940s) <i>whooping cough</i>	1 in 77,000 <i>people in the population</i>	99.9987%
TETANUS (late 1940s)	1 in 200,000 <i>people in the population</i>	99.9995%
MUMPS (1967)	1 in 2,000,000 (fatalities/sterility/deafness) <i>people in the population</i>	99.99995%
RUBELLA (1963)	1 in 1,000,000 (fatalities/birth defects) <i>people in the population</i>	99.9999%
DIPHTHERIA (late 1940s)	1 in 83,000 <i>people in the population</i>	99.9988%
CHICKEN POX (1995)	1 in 2,300,000 <i>people in the population</i>	99.999957%
HEPATITIS B (1991)	1 in 1,400,000 <i>population without high-risk behavior</i>	99.999929%
HIB (1985)	1 in 600,000 (fatalities/brain injury/deafness) <i>people in the population</i>	99.999833%

*The date the vaccine was introduced refers to the first widespread use in the United States for each vaccine.
The fatality/harm rate reflects the number of people who died or suffered permanent harm from each disease out of the total population at that time.*

Source: CDC-Reported Cases and Deaths from Vaccine Preventable Diseases, U.S., 1950-2011; Vital Statistics Rates in the U.S. 1940-1960 - Online database

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Vaccines didn't save humanity. Their impact was somewhere between 1-3.5% of the total decline in mortality rates. Improvement in sanitation and standards of living really did (nutrition, living conditions, etc.). Did vaccines contribute to a small decrease of certain acute illnesses? Yes, but their relative benefit is often exaggerated to an extreme, and then used to browbeat, guilt, and scare parents.

So am I saying no one should vaccinate? No, I'm not. Vaccines provide temporary protection from certain acute illnesses. Some matter more than others. I personally think we give way

too many vaccines, and I think the risk/benefit equation of each vaccine is often obscured. Worse, the lie that vaccines saved humanity in the twentieth century has turned many vaccine promoters into zealots, even though their narratives are simply not supported by the facts. But, by all means, get as many vaccines as you want, I respect your right to make your own medical care choices.

In late 2017, it was reported that Emory University scientists were developing a common cold vaccine. Professor Martin Moore bragged that his research “takes 50 strains of the common cold and puts it into one shot” and that the monkeys who served as test subjects “responded very well.” You should expect to see this vaccine at your pediatrician’s office in the next five years, which will likely be rolled out soon after the stories start to appear in the media about the common cold causing childhood deaths, and that millions of lives will be saved, much as vaccines saved the world in the twentieth century...parents beware, and do your own research!

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