

In the Name of Humanitarianism, COVID Is Crushing Solidarity

Increasingly, our views have little to do with 'the science'. They relate to where each of us stands on a spectrum of fear

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There seems to be a glaring illogic to official arguments about the need to vaccinate British children against Covid that no one in the corporate media wishes to highlight.

Days ago the British government’s experts on vaccinations, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, withstood strong political pressure and decided not to recommend vaccinating children aged between 12 and 15. That was because the JCVI concluded that vaccination could not be justified in the case of children on health grounds.

The implication was that the known health risks associated with vaccination for children – primarily from heart inflammation – outweighed the health benefits. The JCVI also indicated that there might be unknown, longer-term health risks too, given the lack of follow-up among young people and children who have already been vaccinated.

But while the JCVI defied the government, they did not entirely ignore the political demands of them. They offered the government’s four chief medical officers a get-out clause that could be exploited to rationalise the approval of child vaccinations: they conceded that vaccinations might offer other, non-health benefits.

Research suggesting that boys are four times more likely to get serious side-effects from the vaccine than from Covid itself throws another wrench in the highly politicised 'follow the science' narrative, as I explain in my recent post <https://t.co/ykAvaZhTCY>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [September 12, 2021](#)

Utilitarian arguments

Predictably, this utilitarian justification for child vaccinations has been seized on by the

British government. Here is the Guardian uncritically [regurgitating](#) the official position:

“There have also been concerns about the indirect effects of the virus on children. The biggest has been the disruption to schools, which had a severe impact on their mental and physical health, as well as their education.

“That, essentially, is why the four CMOs have said children aged between 12 and 15 should be eligible for the jab.

“They believe that being vaccinated will reduce the risk of disruption to school and extracurricular activities and the effect of this on their mental health and wellbeing.”

Let’s unpack that argument.

Covid poses no serious threat to the overwhelming majority of children, the JCVI and the chief medical officers are agreed. (Those few children who are at risk can be vaccinated under existing rules.)

But, according to the government, Covid has inflicted physical, mental and educational suffering on children because classrooms had to be shut for prolonged periods to protect vulnerable adults in the period before the adult population could be vaccinated.

Now most adults, and almost all vulnerable adults, are vaccinated against Covid, offering them a significant degree of protection.

But still children need to be injected with a vaccine that may, on balance, do more harm to their health than good.

If this is the official argument, we should all be asking: Why?

Two scenarios

There are two potential scenarios for assessing this argument.

The first:

The vaccine works against transmission and severe illness in adults. Schools therefore no longer need to be shut down to protect the adult population. Adults are now largely safe – unless they have decided not to get vaccinated. And that, in turn, means that “indirect” harm to children’s mental and physical wellbeing caused by school closures should no longer be a consideration.

If this is the case, then there are no grounds – either health ones or indirect, non-health ones – to justify vaccinating children.

The second:

The vaccine doesn’t stop transmission and severe illness, but it reduces some transmission and mitigates the worst effects of Covid. This is what the evidence increasingly suggests.

If this is the case, then vaccinating children will not only fail to stop a proportion of them catching and transmitting Covid but it will also fail in its stated purpose: preventing the

future closure of schools and the associated, indirect harms to children.

Worse, at the same time vaccination may increase children's risk of damage to their health from the vaccine itself, as the JCVI's original conclusion implies.

Speculative benefits

Neither scenario offers persuasive medical, or even non-medical, grounds for vaccinating children. A speculative, marginal benefit to the adult population is being prioritised over the rights of children to enjoy bodily autonomy and to avoid being subjected to medical experiments that may have either short-term or long-term effects on their health.

Keep this quote. It'll soon be inconvenient and get forgotten. JCVI prof says: 'The MHRA actually allow you to use a vaccine, and we say, well, do we need to? And the answer is no, not for healthy 12 to 15-year-olds, on health grounds' <https://t.co/2kgdEwRllu> [pic.twitter.com/VCGzJ7SdNN](https://t.co/2kgdEwRllu)

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [September 6, 2021](#)

Just to be clear, as the “follow the science” crowd prepare yet again to be outraged, these are not my arguments. They are implicit in the official reasoning of the experts assessing whether to vaccinate children. They have been ignored on political grounds, because the government would prefer to look like it is actively getting us “back to normal”, and because it has chosen to put all its eggs in the easy (and profitable) vaccine basket.

If vaccines are all that is needed to solve the pandemic, then there is no need to look at other things, such as the gradual dismantling of the National Health Service by successive governments, very much including the current one; our over-consumption economies; nutrient-poor diets promoted by the farming and food industries; and much else besides.

Unadulterated racism

There are, in fact, much more obvious, unequivocal reasons to oppose vaccinating children – aside from the matter that vaccination subordinates children's health to the adult population's wellbeing on the flimsiest of pretexts.

First, vaccination doses wasted on British children could be put to far better use vaccinating vulnerable populations in the Global South. There are good self-interested reasons for us to back this position, especially given the fact that the fight is against a global pandemic in a modern world that is highly interconnected.

But more altruistic – and ethical – concerns should also be at the forefront of discussions too. Our lives aren't more important than those of Africans or Asians. To think otherwise – to imagine that we deserve a third or fourth booster shot or need to vaccinate children to reduce the risk of Covid deaths in the west to near-zero – is pure, unadulterated racism.

And second, a growing body of medical research [indicates](#) that natural immunity confers stronger, longer-lasting protection against Covid.

Given that the virus poses little medical threat to children, the evidence so far suggests they would be better off catching Covid, as apparently half of them already have.

That is both because it serves their own interests by developing in them better immunity against future, nastier variants; and because it serves the interests of the adults around them – assuming (and admittedly it’s a big assumption) that the goal here is not to have adults dependent on endless booster shots to prevent waning immunity and enrich Pfizer.

Worst of both worlds

By contrast, the approach the British government is pursuing – and most of the corporate media is cheerleading – is the worst of both worlds.

British officials want to treat Covid as a continuing menace to public health, one that apparently can never be eradicated. A state of permanent emergency means the government can accrue to itself ever increasing powers, including for surveillance, on the pretext that we are in an endless war against the virus.

But at the same time the government’s implicit “zero tolerance” approach to Covid – in this case, a futile ambition to prevent any hospitalisations or deaths from the virus in the UK – means that the interests of British children, and populations in foreign countries we helped to impoverish through our colonial history, can be sacrificed for the good of adults in rich western countries.

Covid offers ideal conditions to set us at each other's throats. First it was over masks and lockdowns. Then over vaccination status and passports. Now it's children against parents. My latest explains why we're on a slippery slope <https://t.co/VzH5w96XYV>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [September 6, 2021](#)

The combined effect of these two approaches is to foster a political climate in which western governments and the corporate media are better placed to replicate the colonial policy priorities they have traditionally pursued abroad but this time apply them to the home front.

The supposed war against the virus – a war that children apparently must be recruited to fight on our behalf – rather neatly echoes the earlier, now discredited and unravelling “war on terror”.

Both can be presented as threats to our civilisation. Both require the state to redirect vast resources to corporate elites (the “defence” industries and now Big Pharma). Both have led to widespread fear among the populace, making it more compliant. Both require a permanent state of emergency and the sacrifice of our liberties. Both have been promoted in terms of a bogus humanitarianism. And neither war can be won.

Dog eat dog

Recognising these parallels is not the same as denial, though the government and media have every interest to cultivate this as an assumption. There were and are terrorists, even if the term readily gets mangled to serve political agendas. And there is a dangerous virus that vulnerable populations need protection from.

But just as the “terror” threat arose in response to – and to mask – our arrogant, colonial control over, and plundering of, other people’s resources, so this pandemic threat appears

to have arisen, in large part, from our arrogant invasion of every last habitat on the planet, and our ever less healthy, consumption-driven lifestyles.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I wrote an article that went viral called "[A lesson coronavirus is about to teach the world](#)". In it, I argued that our capitalist societies, with their dog-eat-dog ideologies, were the least suited to deal with a health crisis that required solidarity, both local and global.

My latest: The response of leaders like Donald Trump and Boris Johnson to the coronavirus crisis has shed a troubling light on the twisted priorities long cultivated in our societies <https://t.co/YNDYawpBbY>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [March 17, 2020](#)

I noted that Donald Trump, then the US president, was trying to secure an early, exclusive deal for a "silver bullet" – a vaccine – whose first doses he planned to reserve for Americans as a vote-winner at home and then use as leverage over other states to reward those who complied with his, or possibly US, interests. The planet could be divided into friends and foes – those who received the vaccine and those who were denied it.

It was a typically Trumpian vanity project that he did not realise. But in many ways, it has come to pass in a different fashion and in ways that have the potential to be more dangerous than I could foresee.

Divide and rule

The vaccine has indeed been sold as a silver bullet, a panacea that lifts from our shoulders not just the burden of lockdowns and masks but the need for any reflection on what "normal life" means and whether we should want to return to it.

And just as Trump wanted to use vaccine distribution as a tool of divide-and-rule, the vaccination process itself has come to serve a similar end. With the quick roll-out of vaccines, our societies have almost immediately divided between those who demand vaccine passports and mandates as the price for inclusion and those who demand the protection of basic liberties and cultivation of social solidarity without conditions.

In popular discourse, of course, this is being spun as a fight between responsible vaxxers and irresponsible anti-vaxxers. That is more divide-and-rule nonsense. Those in favour of vaccination, and those who have been vaccinated, can be just as concerned about the direction we are heading in as the "anti-vaxxers".

Fear has driven our division: between those who primarily fear the virus and those who primarily fear western elites whose authoritarian instincts are coming to the fore as they confront imminent economic and environmental crises they have no answers for.

Increasingly, where we stand on issues surrounding the pandemic has little to do with "the science" and relates chiefly to where each of us stands on that spectrum of fear.

Hoarding impulse

The vaccination of children highlights this most especially, which is why I have chosen to focus on it. We want children vaccinated not because the research suggests they need it or society benefits from it but because knowing they are vaccinated will still our fear of the virus a little more.

Similarly, we want foreigners denied the vaccine – and that is the choice we make when we prioritise our children being vaccinated and demand booster shots for ourselves – because that too will allay our fears.

We hoard the vaccinations, just as we once did toilet paper. We try to fortify our borders against the virus, just as we do against “immigrants”, even though the rational part of our brain knows that the virus will lap up on our shores, in new variants, unless poorer nations are in a position to vaccinate their populations too.

Our fears, the politicians’ power complexes and the corporations’ profit motives combine to fuel this madness. And in the process we intensify the dog-eat-dog ideology we call western civilisation.

We turn on each other, we prioritise ourselves over the foreigner, we set parent against child, we pit the vaccinated against the unvaccinated – all in the name of a bogus humanitarianism and solidarity.

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This essay first appeared on Jonathan Cook’s blog: <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>

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