

Fear the diseases – not the vaccines

Did you know that in the last century, vaccines (also known as immunizations) have saved more lives than any other health intervention? The World Health Organization estimates that every year, more than two million deaths are prevented worldwide due to immunization.

Today, parents in Canada, the United States and other developed countries have little to no knowledge of the ravages of diseases such as smallpox, polio, and measles. This is primarily because we rarely encounter these diseases anymore due to the success of immunization programs. Are immunization programs becoming victims of their own success? They just might be. As some parents question the importance of immunization, protection from these serious diseases weakens.

Immunization is most effective when more members of the population or “herd” are immunized. High immunization rates keep diseases away. When parents decide not to immunize their children, herd immunity is weakened. Once herd immunity dwindles, diseases can resurface, even in developed countries. In the last couple of years we have seen pertussis outbreaks in some of our communities and parts of our province are currently experiencing a measles outbreak. Both these diseases can have serious consequences, yet the risk of serious complications from the vaccines is extremely low.

Parents want to do what’s best for their children so it’s perfectly natural to have questions about vaccines. I encourage all parents to ask questions and do research in order to arrive at an informed decision. But please make sure your sources are credible. Be skeptical of pseudo-science and celebrity opinion. Seek out credible information sources by asking the following questions: What are the credentials or training of the person giving the information? Is the information source also selling a product, service or alternative therapy? Is the information current and balanced? Are there scientific experts who can back up the information?

Public health nurses are here for you and we want to hear your questions. Give us a call at your local health unit. If you prefer to get your information online, check out ImmunizeBC (<http://www.immunizebc.ca>). We can all work together to make vaccine preventable disease a thing of the past.

Author: Denise Talarico is a Public Health Nurse with Interior Health.

Date: April 15, 2014