

Conservatives, liberals and libertarians should vaccinate

Michael Costello /Lewiston Tribune

I'm old enough to remember the visceral fear that once attended news reports of polio outbreaks. I remember seeing photographs of entire hospital wards dedicated to maintaining paralyzed people in iron lungs.

Very often, the most indelible memories of our youth are of our greatest fears. If my memory serves, it was on the first Monday of each month at 11 a.m. when the air raid sirens were tested. These horns were meant to give us enough time to duck and cover under our school desks in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack. In our schools were posters that decoded the various signal patterns that would give us specific warnings. But we all knew that the sirens simply signaled our imminent incineration.

Almost every month, though, we kids were caught unaware when the siren tests sounded, and for a few moments, until we recalled what day it was and what time it was, we expected the warhead's arrival.

The other great fear was polio. Whenever news of an outbreak reached us, we shuddered in dread. We had seen what polio did to people. And when polio struck a town within our county, the sensation was of a monster plodding over the landscape, as irresistible as Godzilla, toward us.

With the advent of the Salk vaccine, the relief was palpable. We stood in lines that stretched down the street and around the corner to get our shots or sugar cubes.

Before the availability of chickenpox and mumps vaccines, parents of young children formed networks that would alert all families that someone's child had contracted one of those diseases. That kid suddenly had playmates all day long, as parents intentionally exposed their children because those diseases were considered inevitable and take a much greater toll with age.

People have gotten too complacent and fail to understand how recently in our history we have emerged from epidemics and plagues. And they don't appreciate how easy it would be for us to backslide.

Two recent events have brought this almost forgotten legacy of humankind back to the front pages. First of all was the outbreak of measles at Disneyland in California. There have been numerous smaller outbreaks, but this one made headlines.

Secondly, there were the awkward answers to questions about mandatory vaccinations given by Republican presidential candidates Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey and Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky. Both expressed unease over mandatory vaccinations. And, of course, the mainstream news media both exaggerated and distorted what they said.

CNN's Chris Cuomo accused all Republicans of being anti-science. And others somehow placed responsibility for the myth that vaccines cause autism on Republicans. This second falsehood descends from 2008 presidential candidate John McCain's brief flirtation with the anti-vaccine activists.

According to journalist Seth Mnookin, author of the new book, "The Panic Virus: The True Story of Medicine, Science and Fear," the antiviral movement is deeply rooted in America's most anti-conservative communities.

"I talked to a public health official and asked him what's the best way to anticipate where there might be higher than normal rates of vaccine noncompliance, and he said take a map and put a pin wherever there's a Whole Foods. I sort of laughed, and he said, 'No, really, I'm not joking.' It's those communities with the Prius-driving, composting, organic food-eating people."

The fashionable, rich, liberal neighborhoods around Los Angeles have vaccination rates lower than South Sudan. Overall, the U.S. vaccination rate ranks 114th in the world.

The man most responsible for anti-vaccine hysteria is far-left Democrat Robert F. Kennedy Jr. The Daily Show's Jon Stewart and HBO's Bill Maher helped him promote his agenda. Bubble-headed Hollywood leftists anointed themselves as Kennedy's proselytizers.

Maher and Stewart now ridicule anyone who doubts vaccine mandates. But all liberals think they can get away with historical revisions because they control the media.

How's that working out for Brian Williams?

But the fact remains that conservatives and libertarians distrust government mandates. And they need to get over this one. Adult parents who fail to vaccinate their children are not exercising autonomy over their own bodies, they're endangering their children's lives. Parents should have no more authority to deny their child a vaccination than they should have the authority to lower their own child's age of sexual consent.

Conservatives who seek to protect children's lives in the wombs should show equal concern for those same children after birth.

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