

1886

Does Vaccination Protect? (1886)

State Board of Health of Maine

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Does Vaccination Protect?

Issued by the State Board of Health of Maine.

We find that the correct answer to this question is not so clearly in the minds of the people generally as it should be, therefore these facts are given. About one hundred years ago Jenner discovered that, when a person is inoculated with cow-pox virus so as to have cow-pox, the attack of this lighter disease gives immunity from the much more dangerous disease, small-pox. The announcement of his discovery was met with incredulity. Jenner had vaccinated a boy eight years old who had never had small-pox. He said to the incredulous medical men of the day: "If you think the boy is not protected from small-pox give him the small-pox if you can." They did not shut him up with small-pox patients, but they used a surer method. They inoculated the boy with small-pox virus. It did not take. They tried it again with the same result, and repeated it many times carefully until the inoculation had been done twenty times with twenty failures. Then they had to acknowledge that the boy was protected.

The most common popular fallacy in this matter is that vaccination does not prevent one from having small-pox, but only makes the disease milder if one takes it. The truth is that, when successfully done and not done too long ago, the protection is almost absolutely perfect.

In Brussels, out of more than 10,000 children vaccinated in 1860-70, not one case was reported as having been attacked by the terrible epidemic of small-pox which swept over Europe soon after. Dr. Warlomont, who reported these facts, says that he has made a number of appeals for information as to cases of small-pox after vaccination with animal virus, but so far without result. Others have made similar requests, and have offered large rewards for such information, but without avail.

In a severe epidemic of small-pox, which swept over the island of Hayti in 1881-2, Dr. Terres says that, although attending two or three hundred severe cases every day, neither he nor any of his family or servants took the disease (thirteen persons in all), their only protection being successful vaccination. The scholars and teachers of three schools (five hundred in all) were successfully vaccinated, and only one case occurred. Dr. Terres states that not a single death occurred among vaccinated persons.

Dr. Dunn of Minnesota, contrasts the histories of two families, one vaccinated and the other not. "The families are of the same size, living a few miles apart. The ages are nearly the same. On account of carelessness or parsimony neither family had been vaccinated. Small-pox enters one; still they take no preventive

measures. The disease has the same scope as it had in the days before vaccination, and it quickly shows itself to be the same old pest that it was before the immortal Jenner robbed it of its terrors. Of the nine unprotected persons it rapidly destroys three, ruins an eye for yet another, and scars the other five, four of them girls, in a frightful way.

"The other family of ten hear that they have been exposed to small-pox, not aware that the disease has already been for ten days operating in the system of one of its members. They are vaccinated with reliable bovine lymph. Two days later one of the ten comes down with small-pox, which runs a mild course. They are all daily and nightly exposed to the disease, their vaccinations work well and not one of them is attacked."

Dr. Henry Tomkins, Medical Superintendent of the fever Hospital belonging to the Manchester Royal Infirmary at Monsall, in a paper read at Owens College, said:

"The most striking of all evidence is, perhaps, that derived from the small-pox hospitals themselves. Here the protective influence of vaccination is seen and proved in a manner beyond all cavil. At Highgate, during an experience of forty years, no nurse or servant having been re-vaccinated has ever contracted disease, and evidence of the same character I can myself bring forward; for during the whole time that I have had charge of the fever hospital more than a thousand cases of small-pox have passed under my care, yet no servant, nurse, porter, or other person engaged there, has, after re-vaccination, ever taken it, though exposed daily to infection in its most concentrated form. Again, among all the students who, during the past two years, have attended the hospital for clinical instruction, not one has suffered, all having been re-vaccinated before being permitted to enter the small-pox wards. me.

Dr. O. W. Wight, health officer of Detroit, says: "During the winter of 1881-2, when small-pox was epidemic, I allowed fourteen well persons to go to the pest-house in the city of Detroit, who wished to take charge of other members of their families removed there on account of the disease. All of them were vaccinated at the time of going. Not one of them had even a light attack of varioloid. When the anti-vaccinationists will show half or even quarter the number of unvaccinated persons exposed in the midst of the sick and the dying to concentrated contagion without the least injury, I will then listen patiently to their arguments."

Facts and cases by the hundred throwing the weight of their testimony all in the same direction, could be culled from sanitary and medical literature, but these few probably sufficiently show that vaccination protects a person from "catching" small-pox. If the vaccination is imperfect, or done many years ago, it still may be worth much in mitigating the disease and converting it into "varioloid."