

Why I choose to immunise

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With the seasonal flu vaccinations [currently suspended for under-fives in Australia](#), the debate over whether to vaccinate children rears its familiar ugly head. Frightening cases of children admitted to hospital after being immunised, always sends parents into a spin about whether vaccinations are actually the safest option for their children.

We vaccinate our children. Thought I'd put that out there first to save you some time if you'd prefer to not read another rant about vaccinations. But this isn't a standard rant.

You see, we never actually considered *not* vaccinating our children. When our first son was born, I was given the immunisation schedule and conscientiously attended each and every vaccination, given a jellybean by the nurse as I teared up, whilst my baby screamed once and then wondered what all the fuss was about.

Why would I question a free service provided by the government, which has been exhaustively researched and documented? I am not a scientist, medical practitioner or spokesperson for a pharmaceutical company.

All the medical professionals I queried prior to writing this piece supported vaccination. Not surprising, I know. My doctor went so far as to say he found it irresponsible of parents not to immunise their children. My Maternal and Child Health Nurse said if you'd ever seen a tiny baby seriously ill with whooping cough, you would never question immunisation. Old but sturdy arguments.

Ultimately, I am a mum and if the experts tell me immunising my child is the best bet for keeping them safe from potentially deadly diseases, well that's enough for me. If someone offers a counter argument, showing me figures and relevant links, backed up by science, I'll pass it onto my husband to analyse.

My husband is a logical guy with a science brain. *"It's all about probabilities,"* he says to me, when I asked him if he'd ever questioned the importance of immunising. *"People make emotional decisions based on a fear instead of doing risk assessments. It's not an emotional decision, it is a logical one. And no matter how many times you debunk the latest scare campaign they always come back because it's a big headline story to say "Vaccine is dangerous", but no-one would make front page news out of "Vaccine turns out to be safer after all". Thirty children going to hospital from a vaccine is front page news, 1742 people who died in Australia in 2008 from Influenza and pneumonia* won't rate a mention because it's happening every single day. It's like comparing terrorism to car crashes, but which one are you more afraid of?"* He's big on mentioning numbers and gets off on reading anything science-y. I prefer to read something that makes me laugh and there is nothing amusing about whooping cough, polio, or diphtheria. Or autism for that matter.

There is an absolute mind boggle of information out there to support both sides of the argument. Passionate advocates for immunising talk about prevention of the spread of serious infectious diseases, and discuss the rare adverse affects of immunisation against the risk of contracting and spreading the disease itself.

The staunch opposition has a myriad of reasons for not vaccinating: from concerns about the level of aluminium in vaccines, the widely argued (but not proven) link between MMR vaccine and autism, and the political argument that pharmaceutical companies are reluctant to give up a mega money making business.

Perhaps the argument that stands out the most for not immunising is "vaccines are no longer necessary, because the diseases are no longer a threat." Aha. How do you think these diseases are now essentially invisible? It only takes a few families to not immunise and these nasty illnesses could re-emerge.

I did not feel as strongly about immunisation until I started the research. Now I am a one-eyed supporter. I believe that by not immunising my children, I am endangering not just their lives but children in the community. "Herd Immunity" is more often than not protecting those who are unimmunised but an unvaccinated child infecting a new baby, who is too young to be immunised, can be deadly.

It is easy to label the families who choose to immunise as uninformed. An entirely unfounded assumption. Just as lumping all non-immunisers in the category of "hippies" and "rebels" is equally unfair.

United in opinion, or not, it is comforting to know parents are deeply interested in the topic. We all come from the same place – wanting to keep our children

safe. I support a parent's right to choose what they consider is best for their child. My choice is to immunise until the statistics tell me otherwise.

What's your choice? Comment on [Kylie's blog](#).

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* [Link to Stats](#)