

# PRO/CON: Should all children get vaccinated in the United States?

By Tim Wendel and Julie Gunlock, Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.25.18

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Fourth-grader Arylu Paniagua receives an immunization shot from registered nurse Patricia McGleam in the Loyola Pediatric Mobile Health Unit, parked outside Columbus West Elementary School, in Cicero, Illinois. Photo by Tim Boyle/Getty Images

## PRO: Many illnesses are gone thanks to vaccines

My brother died in 1973. He had cancer. At first, he was expected to live only a year.

He lived nearly eight years, though. He might still be with us if an important vaccine had been developed in time.

A vaccine is a shot that protects against a disease. They have saved millions of lives around the world.

Somehow, there are now people who question vaccines. Some parents believe that the side effects of vaccines are serious. They refuse to have their children vaccinated. They are not listening to the science and the stories of families like mine.

## Vaccines Keep Kids From Catching Diseases

Many illnesses have disappeared from the U.S. because of vaccines. More people would get sick in a world without vaccinations. Kids who don't get vaccines develop serious diseases more often.

Cancer drugs helped my brother Eric. He lived for much longer because of them. He learned to sail and skate. He regularly went to school while being treated for his cancer.

## A Chickenpox Vaccine Might Have Saved Eric

Cancer treatment can leave children's bodies weak, though. It can make it harder to fight other problems.

In 1973, at the age of 10, Eric got chickenpox. For another kid, the illness might be just a small problem. For my brother, it proved to be too much.

Within days, he got very sick. Leading cancer experts tried their best to help him. He died within months, though.

A chickenpox vaccine wasn't made until 1995. I wish it would have been there when my brother was alive. It could have saved him.

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## CON: Don't tell, but encourage parents to vaccinate their kids

Deciding to vaccinate your child shouldn't be hard.

Studies show that vaccines are safe. Some people are still afraid of them, though. These fears cause many parents not to vaccinate their children.

This raises an important public health question. Should all people have to vaccinate their kids? If so, how would the government make sure all people do it?

## Some Parents Think Vaccines Can Hurt Children

Many parents say they are not anti-vaccine. They are still afraid of vaccines, though. They say they'd rather not vaccinate their children. They fear something might go wrong if they do.

There's a cost to this way of thinking. More kids are getting diseases that could easily be stopped.

There is a clear need to vaccinate kids. Many people also believe that parents should get to make decisions about their children's health, though. Some people don't like the idea of forcing vaccines on another person's child. It makes them uncomfortable.

We could make a law that all kids need vaccines. How would we make sure people follow the law, though? How would we treat parents who break the rules? Will children be taken away from their anti-vaccine parents? Will their parents face a large fine or even go to jail?

## **Punishing Parents Won't Change Their Minds**

There's a better plan. We could tell anti-vaccine parents their kids can't use government services. The kids would need vaccines to go to public schools.

The government might also say vaccines are necessary to get on certain programs. For example, programs that provide food to those in need. People would need to get vaccinations first. Then they could get help from the government.

Vaccines save lives. It's important that kids get them. We should help people make good decisions, though. We shouldn't punish them for bad decisions.

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