

To vaccinate or not?

Whooping cough can be prevented

"I had a 2-year-old son, and I was concerned. I became one of those parents who worries about these vaccinations."

Catherine Clinton, a local naturopathic doctor, is just one of countless parents who've experienced misgivings related to the risks associated with vaccinations — and with forgoing those vaccinations — particularly in regard to immunizing infants and children against preventable diseases.

Clinton has created a supplement called VacciShield to help with vaccinations.

"You want the vaccination to work and you don't want the bad side effects," Clinton says. Getting vaccinated as a precautionary measure to avoid contracting ailments such as whooping cough carries the possibility of developing an adverse reaction to the very same vaccination that was meant to protect.

What puts this issue under a more recent light is the recent outbreak in the Pacific Northwest of the highly contagious bacterial infection known as pertussis, or whooping cough. Over the course of 2012, the disease has reached near-epidemic status in Washington state and has since passed into Oregon.

According to Oregon Immunization Program spokesperson Susan Wickstrom, the state of Oregon reached a yearly total of 248 cases in May, compared to 102 cases

at the same time last year. As of May 21, 2012, Lane County has seen five cases of whooping cough.

Already this year in Oregon, Wickstrom says, there have been 10 infants — three months old or younger — hospitalized as a result of whooping cough. Adults need to make sure they're up to date with their pertussis booster shots, she says, especially if they're around infants that are too

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young to be immunized and hence more susceptible to infection.

Clinton, a naturopathic doctor and founder of WellFuture LLC, a vitamin supplement company, started investigating the issue of whether to vaccinate a child after facing the same difficult question about vaccinating her own son.

"I want to protect my son from these diseases," says Clinton, and whether or not to vaccinate is something she is continually being asked by the worried parents of her younger patients.

"As parents, we all worry about our kids, and we're all trying to do the best thing," says Clinton. "We don't trust the

powers that be to make sure the schedule [of vaccinations] actually takes in the consideration of the individual health of our children." She describes the two sides of the vaccination debate as butting heads — unnecessarily — all while sharing the same ultimate motive: to keep our children healthy. "We want to have the doctor tell us that, for public health, this is the best we can do," Clinton says, "but still we are left wondering, 'What is best for my child?'"

So when is the best time to give this vaccination to people at high risk of contracting the infection, versus those at

system's response, Clinton says. She adds, "I made sure every ingredient was doing double duty." VacciShield is specifically intended for infants and children.

The key is personalizing immune response to the individual rather than creating a blanket-solution for the whole community, Clinton says, because each individual with his or her own unique, complex version of biology may require that different measures be taken to effectively vaccinate.

Having individualized plans where "you decide what works best for you," Clinton says, is the surest way to combat biological variability and cater to every individual based on his or her own need.

Clinton says she believes there needs to be research that addresses the best time to vaccinate based on the diverse societal makeup of multitudes of unique, individual immune systems — this in addition to governmental focus on a wider-based, community immunity. "Both are really important," Clinton says, "and one is totally ignored."

Rather than just vaccinating or not vaccinating, Clinton says she believes in the notion of offering individualized plans where patients can work with their doctor and decide what works best for them.

Clinton sees it as not so black and white: "You're either vaccinated or not. We're too busy pitting ourselves against each other," she says. "There need to be more options."

For more information on pertussis in Oregon, updated weekly, visit <http://wkly.ws/1aq>



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