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OPINION

Vaccines Save Lives and Protect Future Health

Rejecting the misinformation and the fear

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



I've never forgotten my family's sadness over the senseless death of my childhood neighbor little Johnny Harrington, who lived three houses down from our church parsonage in segregated Bennettsville, S.C. Johnny stepped on a rusted nail and died of the resulting tetanus infection because his

hard-working grandmother had no doctor to advise her nor the money to pay for health care. Over the last four decades the Children's Defense Fund has fought alongside many others to champion policies and programs that work to ensure every child in America gets vaccinated against preventable diseases like tetanus, polio and measles.

Yet in 2019 headlines like "New U.S. measles cases break 25-year-old record" are creating fear and worry, especially among parents. How can it be that we are

seeing more and more outbreaks of a disease declared eliminated in the United States nearly two decades ago? The answer involves a web of linked factors: the spread of misinformation and falsehoods by a small but vocal number of vaccine opponents, gaps in vaccination coverage, and a national and global increase in outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases.

The U.S. has already recorded well over 1,000 cases of measles this year—most of them occurring in children. As we explain in a new brief, this growing crisis is putting our children at risk and must be stopped.

The facts are simple: Vaccines are safe. They are highly effective. They are supported by every major American medical society and government agency and are a routine part of pediatric care. Yet the growing number of outbreaks suggests more must be done to support immunization and halt the spread of serious—and potentially deadly—diseases. The bottom line is that to stop the spread of measles and other serious diseases, parents must have access to factual information from trusted sources to combat fraudulent information spread by the anti-vaccination movement in the U.S. and around

the world. To ensure that parents are equipped with the facts, health care providers, educators, children's groups, policymakers and faith leaders must be vocal advocates for vaccinations, and policies must support vaccination and limit exemptions only to those with legitimate medical reasons.

Why are vaccines so important? Vaccines save lives and protect against long-term health consequences. They reduce disability and suffering, contribute to longer life expectancy, and help lower

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Food Stamps Helped Me Get Back on My Feet

Cutting them is a lose-lose

BY JILL RICHARDSON



The Trump administration has proposed a rule that will cut an estimated 3 million eligible people off food stamps while depriving half a million eligible children of school lunch.

I've been on food stamps. I spent most of my life with mental illness, and it was not diagnosed until a few years ago. Not knowing there was a reason everything was so difficult for me, I pushed myself until I could push no more.

I got good grades in school, and went to college on a scholarship. I got my degree and then got a full-time job like I thought I was supposed to.

I began getting severe migraines every day at the age of 14. That was my body telling me that I was doing more than I could handle and I needed to stop and heal. I had a migraine every day for 23 years. Working was hellish and painful, and I still tried.

When I could no longer handle an office job, I tried being self-employed and working from home. I could never make enough to really get by on. Then I went on food stamps. It didn't mean I could stop working. I got \$70 a month so I could eat, but I still had to pay rent

and put gas in my car, and for that, I worked. Food stamps did its job for me. It helped me get through a tough time until I could get back on my own two feet.

I'm fortunate I didn't have children. If I did, my kids would have suffered through my financial insecurity through no fault of their own. But food stamps and school lunch would have helped ensure they had a chance in life despite being born to a mom too sick to make ends meet.

While the moral righteousness of food stamps justifies the program on its own, there are other benefits to it as well.

Food stamps are a huge stimulus to the economy. Families spend their SNAP benefits to buy food from local businesses like grocery stores, and that creates jobs — from the store clerk stocking the shelves, to the truck driver transporting the food, to the farmers and ranchers producing the food.

For every \$5 the U.S. government spends on food stamps, it generates \$9 in economic activity. That's an incredibly effective stimulus.

Federal school breakfast and lunch programs do more than help food security too — they help kids succeed. Imagine trying to pay attention or take a test while you're hungry. School breakfast and lunch helps kids from low income families break the cycle of poverty when they grow up, because it helps them benefit more from their education.

The movement to cut low-income people who are eligible for food stamps and school lunch off of those programs isn't just immoral, it's short-sighted.

The Trump administration claims the measure will save money because there will be less federal spending on helping hungry people eat. In addition to the cruelty of "saving money" by taking food from the hungry, it will also ultimately harm the nation by

removing the economic stimulus that food stamps provide and making it that much harder for half a million already poor kids to do well in school.

Forcing kids to go hungry is a lose-lose. *OtherWords* columnist Jill Richardson is pursuing a PhD in sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She's currently based in Montana. Distributed by *OtherWords.org*.



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