What is the value of vaccination? It seems a simple question. The first thing that comes to mind is the prevention of disease, and even death.

But what does that mean, exactly?

When we first started talking about this concept of the value of vaccination, it was hard to pull it out of the clouds and bring it down to earth.

“The value of vaccination lies in preventing a visit from the past—a past of misery, disease, and death.”
We don’t think about the protection vaccines have brought into our lives because we don’t see the world as it was before there was such protection. We also don’t often consider the way the world would be, and the risk of old diseases returning, if many people stopped vaccinating.
When you’re sitting around the table on any given holiday, ask your grandparents and other elders what life was like when they were young. Ask them specifically about diseases, and get ready for a floodgate of memories to open up.

The value of vaccination lies in preventing what we don’t see today—misery, disease, and death.

What is your family’s health worth? 
Everything.
It’s easier to digest if we break it down by the numbers, comparing life before and after a vaccine was available for a disease. Here are a few comparisons to give us some perspective on the value of vaccination to keep us all out of the sickbed.

- In the US, whooping cough, or pertussis, plummeted from about 200,000 cases each year in the 20th century, to around 24,000 in 2013.

- Whooping cough continues to be a challenge for all countries, but vaccination has drastically curbed the number of infections and deaths each year.

- Smallpox, diphtheria, and polio were wiped out in the US, thanks to vaccination. Nowadays, most countries don’t see any polio and only a handful of cases of diphtheria.

- In the US, we used to see millions of cases of measles each year, approximately 160,000 cases of mumps, and nearly 50,000 cases of rubella.

- In 2013, there were only a couple of hundred cases of measles, a little over 400 cases of mumps, and just nine cases of rubella.

- Many countries in the world have enjoyed the same drop in numbers for each of these diseases.

- It’s the same story for a nasty little disease called *Haemophilus influenzae* type b—in the US, we had 20,000 cases each year and in 2013, we had only 31.
That’s a lot of big numbers that are now little numbers, and we didn’t even touch on all the vaccine preventable diseases.

Let’s move on from the obvious and talk about other ways in which there is value in vaccination.

Research indicates that the healthy years added to a vaccinated child’s life translate into an increase in the months and years of schooling received, as well as an increase in earnings when the child reaches adulthood. This seems logical, and we see it play out in the US when comparing incomes based on level of schooling achieved.
Vaccinated adults also **prosper** by avoiding weeks of illness or even permanent disability. Many of us aren’t paid for sick days, and if we are, we don’t get many of them. To earn our keep, feed our children, and pay for a roof over our heads, we need to stay healthy.

Vaccines save world governments a tremendous amount of money. The $100 million spent eradicating smallpox saves 1.4 billion dollars every year. If we are able to eradicate polio, we will be able to save $1.5 billion dollars every year by not having to pay for vaccine or for treatment of those infected.

**Value**

Even without getting rid of diseases, vaccines still save a lot of money. For instance, for every dollar spent on MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine, $21 is saved.

It could be that only economists, analysts, and accountants will be interested in the cost-effectiveness of vaccinations, but the reality is that cost is a part of almost everything in our lives, and definitely plays a part in the value of vaccination.

We care that vaccines are available and affordable for our families. We don’t want grandpa to get pneumonia, or mom to get influenza, or the baby to get whooping cough.
The value of vaccination is not just the day of school a little boy can attend because he’s not sick, or the day of work a woman can complete because she’s not sick. There’s a price sticker attached to every illness we avoid.

Vaccines protect most of us from infections. When we’re not vaccinated, we may end up affected by disease not just for a day or a week, but for a long time, even for a lifetime.

Some diseases damage our brains, our major organs, our limbs, our hearing, our fertility—the list of damage that vaccine preventable diseases can cause is long and nasty.

When we’re vaccinated, we avoid these infections that can have long-term consequences on our health and earning ability.

As someone’s grandpa once said, “When you have your health, you have everything.”
Vaccines help us protect friends and loved ones who are living with chronic illnesses such as diabetes or heart disease, or those we know who are battling cancer.

Also, our young and our elderly are some of the most vulnerable people in our families, and in our neighborhoods.

Oftentimes, these people can’t be vaccinated or the vaccines don’t work as well for them. At the same time, if they get these diseases they are more likely to get really sick or die.

One of the values of vaccines is that we can help protect these vulnerable people by getting ourselves and our families vaccinated.
Vaccines also help our schools, public health programs, and health care system focus on other important issues, like educating our children, preventing illnesses through awareness programs, such as those that curbed smoking, and treating obesity, cancer, and heart disease.

Before vaccines, schools often had to close because of a measles outbreak, and public health programs and hospitals spent a lot of their time and effort responding to big disease outbreaks.

So, what is the value of vaccination? It’s our health. And as someone’s grandpa once said, “When you have your health, you have everything.”

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