

## Editor's Note

For years I have seen a trickle of parents who have a concern about the safety and effectiveness of childhood immunizations. Many of the concerned parents are Christian, and many of the Christians are at odds with their culture because they believe in biblical corporal punishment, a young earth, home schooling, large families or something else which the larger culture ridicules or squelches. Some use unorthodox medical remedies. Already somewhat involuntarily alienated, they are accustomed to questioning the accuracy and the authority of academia and the civil state. Questions include: "Is it wise to load an infant's immune system? What else is in the vaccine besides the intended material? another virus perhaps? Does the shot cause seizures or brain damage? Aren't the natural infections more effective in producing immunity? How likely is my child to contract one of these illnesses anyway?"

State officials rely on calculations based on reasonable (though not certain) assumptions that the benefits from the injections are far greater than the risks. The state's view is that of a herdsman overseeing the welfare of an entire herd; the family's view is that of the welfare of a few individuals in the herd.

Without going into the details of each of the many immunizations "offered" (read "required") today, there are some general principles which may help in the decision. (1) Keep your priorities straight. If refusal to accept immunizations is going to get you into trouble with state officials, especially if you are already potentially on a list as a dangerous "fundamentalist" right-wing Christian, recognize that the health values of biblical discipline and education in general greatly exceed the dangers of immunizations. If refusal of immunizations may endanger your other contracultural activities, choose to win the greater battle. The more important battle will almost never be the one over immunizations. (2) If immunities are not lifelong, then boosters are going to become the norm lest we have an epidemic of childhood illnesses in adults or the elderly where their danger is greater. Realize, however, that the opportunity for your children to catch the "wild type" or natural infections during childhood is small, due to the

large numbers of immunized children. While it seems likely to me that at least some of the immunizations now used are not going to produce lifelong immunity, you don't really have a choice to see your child catch measles or mumps or the like. The changes that an immunization will last for a lifetime is better than the near certainty that your child will enter adult life without any immunity at all to those diseases. (3) The dangers of vaccines, while undeniable, including such disasters as largescale vaccine-caused polio several decades ago and small-scale transmission today, apparently are quite small. The dangers fall into a background static that requires huge numbers of people and careful statistical study to sort out. Single case studies or testimonials are bootless to answer the question. Anyone against anything can dig up or adapt scary stories. The risk your child takes riding a bicycle for a total of a few hours may well exceed the risk you are trying to calculate. (4) Just as the proponents of immunizations have their agendas, so also do those who oppose them. Be as discerning about these agendas as about those of the statisticians who want to control the herd. A fascinating look at how the virologist insiders behave can be had in the book, "Why We Will Never Win the War On AIDS," by Peter Duisberg and Bryan J. Ellison, 1994, Inside Story Communications. (5) Do not confuse the matter of the right of the civil authorities to require immunizations with the efficacy issue. Both are legitimate issues and should be dealt with separately. The right, for example, of the state to require a healthy infant to have an alien substance injected into his body because he might, someday, be a risk to an unborn baby whose mother has not protected herself with the vaccine, needs to be questioned even if the vaccines are completely effective and safe.

Having glossed over some general principles, it must be remembered that the devil is in the details. Each vaccine is different. Some have a long history of use, such as tetanus. Some are recently developed, such as haemophilus influenzae. Some are live virus, some are killed. Some induce antibodies in the blood, some in the bowel. If you wish to make your decision based on the

basic research, you have your work cut out for you. It won't do just to read the package insert for that is, as one correspondent recently stated it, propaganda. You will need to read and comprehend reams of technical data on each vaccine. It would be a work of months for someone conversant with the vocabulary and methodology. Maybe some Christian with these qualifications and the time will undertake to provide this service.