



# **Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver**

*Arthur Allen*

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## **Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver** Arthur Allen

Arthur Allen reveals a history of vaccination that is both illuminated with hope and shrouded by controversy - covering Jenner's discovery to Pasteur's vaccines for rabies and cholera, to those that safeguarded the children of the 20th century.

## **Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver Details**

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# **From Reader Review Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver for online ebook**

## **Ross Mckinney says**

I had to read this for a course I'm teaching on bioethics and epidemics. It's a good book and an interesting story, but it could have been more. At times, there's more attention to the what happened when than to what the events meant, and to how they fit together. His best section is his portrait of Neal Halsey, debating what to do about thimerosal in vaccines - a crisis in what should have been an issue that could have been resolved more slowly. Nevertheless, it's a book that's still worthwhile for those interested in vaccination and the public policy side of making people accept an immunization they don't want. It strives to be balanced, which may mean it leans a little too far to being polite about people willing to accept wild theories as science. He presents the theories and lets you judge. When people claim mercury is the reason vaccines cause autism, and then cite a series of vaccines their child received, none of which had any mercury, the point of the storytelling is still pretty clear. Recommended if the topic interests you; not a necessary book otherwise.

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## **Erik says**

Very good overview of vaccines from their origins to today. A book that needed to be written.

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## **spencer says**

Straight-forward history of vaccination.

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## **Yasha Macdonald says**

The history of vaccination in the the western world has displayed the driving force in medical advancements as mans' fight against disease and at times the not so noble intentions that back it.

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## **SANTOSH REDDY says**

Immunization like all other medical practices has evolved over the past two centuries based upon the works of many of the pioneers like Pasteur, Jenner and others .These practices evolved mainly as a result of many bold trial and error methods. These methods when compared to present day practices were rather crude and certainly far from immunization standards of today. This book is certainly helpful for all those who think that immunization like all other medical practices has to be followed blindly. After reading this book i as a medico have started to think the utility of some vaccines and their dose schedules (eg ,hepatitis 0 dose) .

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## **Dimity says**

When I finished *Vaccine*, it seemed like I'd been reading it for months. In fact, I had been-this book took me forever and a day to finish and if it weren't my intense fascination with the subject material, I don't know if I would have made it through. That's not necessarily a dig at the book, but many parts of it were definitely more exhaustive than I was looking for at the moment. It's apparent that Arthur Allen spent a great amount of time and effort writing this book and although it's more of a popular narrative history, it's also much more in-depth and occasionally dry than many other history books intended for a general audience.

I think what I appreciated most about this book was how clearly it illustrated that the arguments for and against vaccination haven't changed that much since the debate began with cow pox vaccination. The logic against vaccines (polluting the blood, not as good as "natural immunity" etc.) are arguments I see over and over again at the anti-vaccine sites on facebook, mostly declared without much background knowledge of how these arguments were developed and used through time. I also appreciated Allen's coverage of how many pro-vaccine advocates were more than willing to overlook possible negative reactions attributed to their vaccines and I feel that this part of the story needs to be told as well. If those who speak up for vaccines' safety and importance seek to counteract the anti-vaccine crowd's accusations, we must have an accurate understanding of where pro-vaccine scientists and policy-makers have messed up in the past. (That said, I feel completely confident that the current system of vaccine regulation in the United States may not be perfect but it protects citizens-I don't believe there are hidden legions of "vaccine injured" children suffering in silence.)

I also liked Allen's detailed accounting of the vaccine industry in America. One of the most common arguments I see is that vaccines are a Big Pharma cash cow but it's obvious that pharmaceutical companies are by and large not profiting from developing and producing immunizations. I was often bored and overwhelmed by the hundreds of people Allen talks about as I'm not that interested in who developed which vaccine but on the flipside, I did appreciate his exhaustive research about individuals because I was very intrigued by what seemed like rather high numbers of women working to develop vaccines, particularly in the twentieth century. I wonder if vaccinology had more women in its ranks because vaccines are primarily developed for and given to children, who are often seen as part of women's realm.

*Vaccine* isn't a page turner but it is an interesting and worthwhile read for anyone looking to gain a broad understanding of immunization's history, both how the vaccines themselves were developed as well as the minority reactions to the practice of immunization through time.

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## **Laura Casper says**

Great insight into the pros/cons of public health requirements on the community

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## **Nux says**

Gah! I don't give a toss about how this or that researcher look like or how he's driven his wife mad to the point that she's committed suicide!

Neither do I care much about the vaccines developers' politics if it has nothing to do with the outcome of the

vaccine's safety/ efficacy.

I want to read about how the vaccines are developed, what were the pitfalls & side effects, how they were tested & whether or not I can trust the ones that are used now. Internationally. Not just in the USA.

I still have about a quarter of the book to go. It has been such a hard work so far.

Waaay too much fluff & unnecessary details about how this and that researcher look like, all the details that are too distracting and to be frank are just plain annoying! Grrr!

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### **Amber says**

I was told to read this book by a professor whose current research is focused around creating a vaccine against tropical helminth disease. I'm preparing to join her research team in the fall so she wanted me to read this book in order to get an introduction on the history and controversies surrounding vaccines. While this book is probably a brief summary of the history of vaccines, I found it a little tedious to get through. The author did a great job explaining certain controversies but I feel as though it went a little too far in depth about vaccine legislation in some places. However, I did learn a lot and found the majority of the book to be interesting!

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### **Alla says**

I deliberately started my vaccine research with this book - this is a history of vaccines from the times of Jenner and variolation to George Bush being vaccinated for now non-existent smallpox on TV to demonstrate his belief in the threat of bio-terrorism. I expected for this book to be as neutral as possible for a text on a controversial subject. As a parent to be, I am trying to go into the issue with an open mind - it is after all about the safety of my child, not which political group I happen to identify with the most. On this particular criterion of neutrality, however, Allen does not quite measure up. For instance, after describing numerous confirmed cases of vaccine injuries, he would still refer to vaccines as "completely safe" or "entirely safe" without providing any justification for his logic. As a reasonable human being, I understand that both diseases and vaccines come with risks. What scares me is the denial or belittling of risks which leaves me in no position to compare them intelligently.

Another quite annoying aspect is Allen's description of those people who don't vaccinate. He admits it that in some communities people who don't vaccinate are mostly PhD's, quite successful and well-off, but he mentions it in passing. However, an entire chapter is devoted to describing wackos in sects and with no understanding or respect for science as an example of the people "who prefer the whooping cough". That is offensive, as many people I personally know who choose to not vaccinate or vaccinate selectively (which is the option that I am leaning towards) are very reasonable people who did their homework.

This is a thoroughly researched text, however, and it serves its purpose. Definitely a good starting point for those parents who want to know everything there is to know about vaccinations to make the right decision.

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### **Alexandra says**

definitely read if you are a science nerd or are interested in some of the history behind vaccinations

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### **Alison Whiteman says**

If you want to read a 400-page New Yorker article, this is the book. It was fascinating and mind numbing due to the sheer amount of information. I learned things such as more WWI soldiers died from preventable infections than the war itself. George Bush was instrumental in not only the war on terror and fear mongering, but at the same time the possibility of bio-terrorism. If he got all the vaccines in 2002 that Saddam did not use against us, why didn't the rest of America's citizens get the same vaccines?

The political, religious and scientific struggles remain the same to this day. I was sad to read measles had been eradicated by 1998 but is now back in this the year 2015. The parents of autistic children have a right to be upset, but to blame vaccines is very strange after reading this book. The same vaccines given to children in Denmark have not resulted in the number of autistic children in America. The cause is not known. The parents marching and suing is not helping the advancement of finding a scientific reason for autism.

FDR has always been a hero to me but his fight to find a vaccine for polio made me more proud than ever. The greater good was always his political position. What did I learn overall? History repeats itself. Now in 2015 the hysteria has started all over again. I am glad I live in these modern times. I did not get polio. I do have MS, but it is not due to any vaccine as the disease has been documented since the 1300s.

I rated it with three stars only because it was just too much all packed into one book.

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### **Kristen says**

This book was at different times: boring, informative, interesting and confusing. Certain chapters focused on science, others on public health & science policy, and others on the drawbacks of the ease of communication made by the internet.

Ultimately I didn't feel that Allen was presenting a completely objective perspective, but this may be fair considering the statistics he presents do reveal that vaccinations are ultimately effective and have increased the safety of the population - though there are still risks involved.

I watched Food Inc. a few weeks ago and was rather compelled as the mother of a son who died from e. coli poisoning lamented how the food industry never apologized or even acknowledged their fault. I can easily imagine how the diphtheria vdo that was released, or if one were to be released by Jenny McCarthy or other parents of autistic children could be just as convincing. However, as Allen described, 13 parents with similar experiences barely qualify as a statistic out of the millions who get vaccinated every year.

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### **Ilian Bambekov says**

Walking past the book shelf that we have in our office, I stumbled upon a book that seemed kind of dull at first due to the blank cover and large thickness it showed. Who would have known I was in for a surprise? The book Vaccine is really well written by Arthur Allen and he describes the pros and cons of vaccines in a perspective which is far greater than what I had settled for previously. Allen does this in such a way that

properly convinces the reader to ultimately choose between the risk of receiving a vaccine, and it compares it with the benefits of being vaccinated.

Ultimately, he is able to underline the importance in the benefits of being vaccinated and then places statistics to support his arguments that vaccines are important medical advancements that have allowed the human immune system to synthesize pieces of a bacteria and create a natural resistance to it. Allen outlines multiple times throughout his book that the benefits of vaccines in the modern age have allowed humanity itself to persevere through many deadly outbreaks as well as increase the amount of time that we live.

There are 2 well developed reasons as to why this book is extremely well written. First, it is a non-fictional book that relates to many people's concerns and it informs the reader of the risks as well as the benefits of vaccines. The second is that this issue is really important. As vaccines are being developed, there might always be the risk of a human error. 1 incorrect proportion and another human will pay for the mistake.

Ultimately, this book is life changing and it has definitely changed my opinion on vaccination.

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### **Michele Weitz says**

An intriguing history of the controversy over vaccines--from smallpox to modern day. A fast read for non-fiction, but I would still recommend going straight the chapters on modern day controversies over the benefits vs. the risks of vaccination, the speculation about autism and vaccination, and the most recent attempts to mass vaccinate the US.

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