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Vaccine: The Controversial Story Of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver



Synopsis

"A timely, fair-minded and crisply written account." — New York Times Book Review
Vaccine juxtaposes the stories of brilliant scientists with the industry's struggle to produce safe, effective, and profitable vaccines. It focuses on the role of military and medical authority in the introduction of vaccines and looks at why some parents have resisted this authority. Political and social intrigue have often accompanied vaccination — from the divisive introduction of smallpox inoculation in colonial Boston to the 9,000 lawsuits recently filed by parents convinced that vaccines caused their children's autism. With narrative grace and investigative journalism, Arthur Allen reveals a history illuminated by hope and shrouded by controversy, and he sheds new light on changing notions of health, risk, and the common good.

Book Information

Paperback: 544 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition (May 17, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393331563

ISBN-13: 978-0393331561

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1.3 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 33 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #493,121 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #33 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Preventive Medicine #41 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Vaccinations #112 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Preventive Medicine

Customer Reviews

Vaccines are one of the most important and controversial achievements in public health. Washington-based journalist Allen explores in depth this dark horse of medicine from the first instances of doctors saving patients from smallpox by infecting them with it to the current controversy over vaccinating preteen girls against the sexually transmitted virus that causes cervical cancer. One thing becomes very clear: fear of vaccination is not a recent problem. In colonial America, inoculations against smallpox were seen by many as a means of deflecting the will of God. In the 20th century, the triumphs of the Salk polio vaccine and the eradication of smallpox may actually have led to current antivaccination movements: "as infectious diseases disappeared, in part

thanks to vaccines, the risks of vaccination itself were thrown into relief." Allen's comprehensive, often unexpected and intelligently told history illuminates the complexity of a public health policy that may put the individual at risk but will save the community. This book leaves the reader with a sense of awe at all that vaccination has accomplished and trepidation over the future of the vaccine industry. 16 pages of illus. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Pulling together years of accumulated research on a topic he has written about for several national publications, Allen recounts the 200-year history of vaccination, from its first employment to combat smallpox, "the first and only contagious disease ever eradicated" by a vaccine, to the present, in which decades of unanswered questions plus low profit margins for vaccine development threaten its future. Allen undertakes a ponderous mission indeed because there has been so much controversy, most recently regarding an alleged link between autism and a vaccine, and disagreement over the efficacy of various vaccines. A 2005 study found little difference in fatality rates between elderly flu shot recipients and those who didn't get the shots, and then there's the whole discussion about how much social responsibility the individual must bear when getting a vaccination that puts the recipient at risk of unwanted side effects but also helps protect the community from an epidemic. Thorny issues all, which Allen deftly maneuvers as he wrangles myriad aspects of a very complicated issue into a comprehensible text. Donna Chavez Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I enjoyed reading this book for its historical perspective as well as for the few chapters of investigative journalism done during recent whooping cough outbreaks. I think Allen portrayed anti-vaccinating parents somewhat unfairly during the whooping cough epidemic, but perhaps his account was accurate based on what he experienced. More interesting was the history and the arguments for/against vaccines that have been brought up over the past 2+ centuries since variolation was in practice to protect against smallpox. A lot of the arguments from the early days have persisted, and he fairly points out, with skepticism, how some concerns just don't make much sense. One thing I was pleased with is that, even though this book seems to come out in favor of vaccines overall, he didn't shy away from some of the serious issues with vaccines: such as SV40 in polio vaccine in the 60's which was found to cause tumors, and Hepatitis B being introduced during the course of vaccination because of the use of human blood serum and the routine re-use of needles for vaccinating in low-resource areas. A great book for anyone who wants a fair look at

vaccine history. The only con is that it could get a bit dry during long discussions of the process of creating some vaccines and the politics involved.

Arthur Allen provides a highly accurate history of vaccinations. He doesn't mince words yet conveys the world of diseases honestly. This book reads like a good news paper article. The footnotes are incredible. I use this as a text book for my clinical students. An incredible account, well told.

good book.. super fast shipping.

It has been some time since I read it. I think I will read it again. He gives you a good understanding of vaccine without being biased.

Great price for thr book. Ordered it for a paper I was doing. It's interesting in thr beginning but becomes a bit of a drag towards the middle..

and the author does a good research job and then takes the time to document all his sources. This is why I still buy books and don't take what I see on the internet too seriously. Those who still believe that vaccines are to blame for autism or other ills their children contract won't like this book. Those who don't believe that members of a society have a certain obligation to one another as a result of living in a community won't like this book. I think that author is a little degoratory when speaking about the movements that have sprung up around the previously mentioned misconceptions but to give him his due, he does methodically go through all the material, studies etc that have been done to test these unproven hypothesis, soooooooooo. I think this is a very well written and well researched book.

The book is very well-written and extensively researched. The information provided is accurate and balanced. Mr. Allen does not shy away from criticizing the public health establishment when it refused, for instance, to recognize dangers associated with small pox vaccine during the early days of vaccination. At the same time, he clearly recognizes and accurately gives credit to vaccination for the many health benefits provided by vaccines. By the way, there are not "mounting problems with the current vaccination schedule" and mercury was removed from childhood vaccines several years ago.

This will appeal to many people, from history buffs to health professionals and those of us who also love a good story. Myself, I always enjoy the human behavior aspect to how things came to be in our society, and the story of vaccination is terrific. Aside from the fun aspect of this book, Mr. Allen manages to write compassionately about the real people who have believed that their children's autism was caused by vaccines. There has been so much propaganda and spurious argumentation around this issue (particularly by people like Don Imus--he should be ashamed of himself), which has unfortunately lead many parents of children with autism to believe that vaccination caused their child's disability. I hope very much that Mr. Allen's work will help shine the light of reason on that sad situation.

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