

JANUARY 2016

**COMPULSORY
VACCINATIONS**

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DEBATING MATTERS
TOPIC
GUIDES

MOTION:

**“CHILDHOOD
VACCINATIONS
SHOULD BE
COMPULSORY”**

ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.

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KEY TERMS

[Common Good](#)

[Community \(herd\) immunity](#)

[Epidemic](#)

[Immunisation](#)

[Measles](#)

[MMR vaccine](#)

[Vaccine](#)

INTRODUCTION

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In the winter of 2012 a measles epidemic took place in south Wales [Ref: [BBC News](#)], affecting nearly 1500 people, and resulting in the death of one person. Less than four months after health authorities declared that epidemic over, another one struck in the same area. 1988 heralded the introduction of the combined MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine in the UK [Ref: [Merriam-Webster](#)], and a decade later in 1998, a controversial and now discredited research paper by Dr Andrew Wakefield, published in medical journal The Lancet, suggested a connection between the MMR vaccination and the development of autism in children. Although Dr Wakefield's research has been rejected, it is widely agreed that the scare about MMR [Ref: [Independent](#)] resulted in a decline in measles vaccinations in the UK - falling from a peak of 94% for two year olds in 1995, to 78% in 2003. In the Swansea area, most affected by the Welsh outbreaks, take-up had declined to just 67.5%. The importance of these figures is that the MMR scare affected 'herd immunity' levels for measles, putting children at much higher risk of catching the disease [Ref: [vaccines.gov](#)]. This has prompted some to argue that the current system for delivering childhood vaccines in the UK, which relies on parents voluntarily immunising their children, should be reviewed, and replaced with a compulsory vaccination programme because, "we need a 95 per cent vaccination rate for herd immunity to protect against contagious diseases" [Ref: [Metro](#)]. It is commonly agreed that herd immunity is important for disease control, and that the development of vaccines have greatly reduced childhood mortality and tackled disease globally. But in the light of declining vaccine take up in recent years, both in the UK and elsewhere, there is a debate today about the best way to ensure the greatest levels of immunisation amongst populations. Is a voluntary or compulsory system of childhood vaccination best, and what are the arguments for either side?



THE COMPULSORY VACCINATIONS DEBATE IN CONTEXT

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Immunisation then and now

Prior to the development of vaccines in the eighteenth century, people could only become immune to diseases by contracting, and then surviving them. The process of surviving meant the body had learnt to deal with, and ultimately destroy, the microorganisms that caused the disease. The development of modern immunisation [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)] against infectious diseases can be administered in a number of ways, but most commonly through vaccination. Artificial active immunisation delivers a very small and weakened quantity of virus into the body, giving the immune system a chance to create its own antibodies and other defence mechanisms, thus preparing it for any future attacks of the disease. Many childhood diseases, which in previous eras could have been deadly, are now readily managed and controlled, especially in the West. The introduction of the Polio vaccine in 1953 [Ref: [History.com](#)], for example, has seen an almost complete eradication of the disease worldwide, with just those countries with less comprehensive immunisation programmes still suffering outbreaks [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. But not everyone supports or approves of vaccination programmes, for a variety of sometimes complex reasons. Over the past two decades there has been increasingly vocal anti-vaccination movements in the UK and the USA which, according to some commentators, “frequently harbor a deep distrust of government. They often suggest that vaccination is motivated by profit and is an infringement of personal liberty and choice; vaccines violate the laws and nature and are temporary or ineffective; and good hygiene is sufficient to protect against disease.” [Ref: [Washington Post](#)] But it’s not the case that those who rejected the MMR jab for their children were ideologically opposed to vaccinations. Parents often found themselves in an impossible position, as parent Kirsty Grocott explained: “We were making decisions about an illness that many of us had never seen at first hand. Measles

itself was an abstract compared to the perceived threat of autism. Parents made decisions believing them to be in the best interests of their children, people capable of rational and intelligent thought, decided to eschew the vaccination because they genuinely felt that the risk was too great.” [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]

The case for compulsory childhood vaccinations

According to the World Health organisation, measles is one of the leading causes of childhood death globally [Ref: [WHO](#)], leading them to declare earlier this year, that vaccinations must be stepped up across Europe and Central Asia in response to a series of outbreaks [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. “As a society, we don’t condone behaviour that puts others at risk for injury or death” argues American doctor Robert Pearl. “Refusing vaccination for reasons other than a serious medical condition is unfair and dangerous to those who can’t protect themselves.” [Ref: [Forbes](#)]

The key argument about herd immunity, put forward by many calling for compulsory vaccinations, is that an individual choice, when it puts other members of society of risk, is no longer a valid one. “Risking other children’s lives, and other parents’ pain, is exactly what you’re doing when you don’t vaccinate your child: you’re not just making decisions about your children’s health, but the health and safety of the children around them.” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]

More importantly, this debate raises difficult issues about the importance of parental autonomy to make decisions about their children, versus the needs of society as a whole: “The fact that individual rationality is sometimes at odds with the requirements of the common good is a quandary at the heart of moral and political philosophy. The function of the state, according to standard liberal theories, is to find a practical resolution to this central tension and solve collective action problems that otherwise won’t get solved in order to provide public goods—public order, military defence,



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public sanitation, environmental protection, etc—that otherwise won't get provided." [Ref: [Economist](#)] But others counter that the MMR scare played into a broader contemporary distrust of big-pharma, and government health advice, and that: "In an era when people are less accepting of authority and do not expect to do something because the government says so, trying to enforce immunization may actually make matters worse." [Ref: [New York Times](#)]

The case against compulsion

The key issue at stake here is who gets to decide about the healthcare needs to children – the authorities or parents? Critics of enforced vaccinations argue that it may have the opposite effect to that desired, and end up demonising parental choice: "We can agree that anti-vaxxers are wrong about the science, and still be disturbed at the state trying to compel people to do things to their children they would rather not. Anti-vaxxers are not, after all, guilty of a crime of neglect or cruelty: their actions are born of divergent (if scientifically unsound) beliefs about what constitutes child welfare." [Ref: [Guardian](#)] Academic Jennifer Margulis says that: "There is tremendous evidence showing vaccinations prevent childhood diseases. Should public health officials do everything they can to encourage, inform and facilitate childhood vaccinations? Yes. Do they have the right to force parents to vaccinate their children? Absolutely not." [Ref: [New York Times](#)] In the United States, vaccinations are compulsory, but there is a complex state-specific system of exemptions, allowing parents to reject mandatory vaccinations on medical, religious or philosophical grounds [Ref: [National Vaccine Information Centre](#)]. And although the antivaccine parents are very vocal they are in a very small minority and some suggest that: "Now would not seem the time to be more coercive" [Ref: [New York Times](#)]. One parent explained that, "governments' vaccine

programmes are... "population driven" - dedicated to doing what's best for the world's population as a whole. Parents, meanwhile, are child-focused." [Ref: [Independent](#)] So how should we respond, both domestically and globally, to what seems like a potential return of measles on a larger scale than we've known for decades? Is there a case for governments to mandate that parents vaccinate their children for the 'common good' [Ref: [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)]? Or is herd immunity better secured through convincing parents of the efficacy and safety of immunisation, and relying on them to want to do so for their own children as well as others?

Scared parents, scary science

In addition to the recent UK outbreaks, high-profile outbreaks have happened in: California, where take-up rates can be as low as 50% [Ref: [Los Angeles Times](#)]; in Germany, where take-up is high at around 90%, and those who fell ill were mainly adult, with some suggesting the high level of un-vaccinated people emigrating from Eastern Europe may have affected wider herd immunity [Ref: [Washington Post](#)]; in Quebec, Canada, where there have been multiple outbreaks, with large parts of the population apparently un-vaccinated "... for religious and philosophical reasons, which explains the exponential rise in the number of cases" [Ref: [BBC News](#)]; and in Australia, which had previously been declared measles free in 2008, vaccination has dropped to as low of 50%, resulting in a recent outbreak, and renewed debate there about state compulsion to vaccinate [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)]. Some commentators argue it is important to look beyond the decisions made by individual parent's choices for the root cause of a decline in vaccination take-up, and instead look at how parents became distrustful and scared of the MMR vaccination. Author Ben Goldacre argues that the media coverage of an obscure research paper, published by



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an unknown doctor, in a specialist medical journal on the complex issue of autism allowed MMR to become: “The proto-typical health scare, by which all others must be judged and understood. It has every ingredient, every canard, every sleight of hand and, every aspect of venal incompetence and hysteria, systemic and individual.”

[Ref: [Bad Science](#)] London GP Dr Michael Fitzpatrick argues that the reaction “reflects the existence of a widespread mood of anxiety and suspicion, and a loss of confidence in our ability to rely on our powers of reason. Only in that wider climate could the peer reviewers and the editors, the doctors and scientists and journalists, have allowed Wakefield to make such an impact.” [Ref: [spiked](#)]



ESSENTIAL READING

[Why James Wilson and The Economist supported compulsory vaccinations](#)

Economist 24 February 2015

[Why did I think it appropriate to deny my children the MMR vaccine?](#)

Kirsty Grocott *Telegraph* 25 April 2013

FOR

[It's not about just your child: Why vaccination should be mandatory for kids](#)

Kristen Thompson *Metro* 10 February 2015

[A Doctor's Take: Why Measles Vaccination Must Be Mandatory](#)

Robert Pearl *Forbes* 5 February 2015

[Resorting to freedom](#)

Economist 4 February 2015

[Your thoughts about vaccines don't trump another child's medical reality](#)

Jessica Valenti *Guardian* 3 February 2015

AGAINST

[Everyone is lining up to punish parents who are anti-vaccination. Isn't that worrying?](#)

Jason Wilson *Guardian* 13 April 2015

[Why I believe vaccines should not be mandatory](#)

Deborah Jacobi *Algemeiner* 2 March 2015

[In Britain, vaccinate with persuasion not coercion](#)

David Elliman & Helen Bedford *New York Times* 23 March 2014

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[Parents deserve to have a choice about vaccinations](#)

Jennifer Margulis *New York Times* 23 March 2014

IN DEPTH

[What if not all parents who question vaccines are foolish and anti-science?](#)

Alice Dreger *New Statesman* 4 June 2015

[Cultural perspectives on vaccination](#)

The College of Physicians of Philadelphia 15 December 2014

[The real lessons of the MMR debacle](#)

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick *spiked* 25 January 2011

ORGANISATIONS

[Arnica](#)

[National Vaccine Information Centre](#)

[World Health Organisation](#)



BACKGROUNDEERS

[I was on the front line of L.A.'s last measles outbreak](#)

Ken Fujioka *Time Magazine* 24 August 2015

['We are not anti-science': mothers defend right to not vaccinate children](#)

Guardian 22 February 2015

[Onwards and upwards](#)

Economist 21 February 2015

[Return of the vaccine wars](#)

David Oshinsky *Wall Street Journal* 20 February 2015

[Shifting the old debate over vaccines](#)

Theresa MacPhail *Huffington Post* 9 February 2015

[The UK's anti-vaccination movement is alive and well, and we can't ignore it](#)

Barbara Speed *Independent* 6 February 2015

[How to cause a measles epidemic in 5 easy steps](#)

Dr Paul Marantz *Huffington Post* 6 February 2015

['No jab, no pay': should parents be forced to vaccinate their kids?](#)

The Week 4 February 2015

[To the anti-vaxxers: please don't give measles to my tiny, helpless future baby](#)

Lindy West *Guardian* 3 February 2015

[Roald Dahl becomes the sage of American measles outbreak](#)

Guardian 2 February 2015

[Of vaccines and vacuous starlets](#)

Economist 31 January 2015

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[The Disneyland measles outbreak and the disgraced doctor who whipped up vaccination fear](#)

Terrence McCoy *Washington Post* 23 January 2015

[Why some experts want mandatory flu vaccinations for school children](#)

Justin Worland *Time Magazine* 7 January 2015

[Debate: given the measles outbreak, should vaccinations be mandatory?](#)

New York Times 23 March 2014

[Measles outbreak in maps and graphics](#)

BBC News 2 May 2013

[Why I wish my daughter had been vaccinated](#)

Sophie Heawood *Guardian* 24 April 2013

[Timeline: How the Andrew Wakefield MMR vaccine scare story spread](#)

Independent 12 April 2013

[Measles Explained — Vaccinate or Not?](#)

In a Nutshell

[Salk announces polio vaccine](#)

History.com



IN THE NEWS

[California set to mandate childhood vaccines amid intense fight](#)

New York Times 25 June 2015

[Australia's 'measles-free' status under threat as vaccination rates drop to 50 per cent](#)

Daily Mail 1 May 2015

[California's measles outbreak is over, but vaccine fight continues](#)

L.A Times 17 April 2015

[Australia to stop welfare cash of anti-vaccine parents](#)

BBC News 12 April 2015

[US states face fierce protests from anti-vaccine activists](#)

Guardian 10 April 2015

[India and 10 other Asian countries declared polio free](#)

Guardian 28 March 2015

[Measles cases jump to 119 in Quebec area of Canada](#)

BBC News 11 March 2015

[WHO 'taken aback' at measles outbreak](#)

BBC News 25 February 2015

[Germany measles: Toddler death fuels compulsory vaccination debate](#)

BBC News 23 February 2015

[Toddler death fuels compulsory vaccination debate](#)

BBC News 23 February 2015

[Germany is battling a measles outbreak that is 10 times worse than the one in the U.S.](#)

Washington Post 7 February 2015

[Vaccine critics turn defensive over measles](#)

New York Times 30 January 2015

[Disneyland measles outbreak leaves many anti-vaccination parents unmoved](#)

Guardian 25 January 2015

[Swansea measles: Epidemic tops 1,000 cases](#)

BBC News 30 April 2013

[Swansea measles epidemic: Man who died had measles](#)

BBC News 19 April 2013

[Childhood vaccinations should be compulsory, says former head of BMA](#)

Telegraph 4 June 2009

[Compulsory vaccination urged after measles outbreaks](#)

Guardian 3 June 2009

[Doctors say no compulsory vaccines](#)

Daily Mail

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AUDIO/VISUAL

[Measles outbreak in maps and graphics](#)

BBC News 2 May 2013



ADVICE FOR DEBATING MATTERS



FOR STUDENTS

READ EVERYTHING

In the Topic Guide and in the news - not just your side of the argument either.

STATISTICS ARE GOOD BUT.....

Your opponents will have their own too. They'll support your points but they aren't a substitute for them.

BE BOLD

Get straight to the point but don't rush into things: make sure you aren't falling back on earlier assertions because interpreting a debate too narrowly might show a lack of understanding or confidence.

DON'T BACK DOWN

Try to take your case to its logical conclusion before trying to seem 'balanced' - your ability to challenge fundamental principles will be rewarded - even if you personally disagree with your arguments.

DON'T PANIC

Never assume you've lost because every question is an opportunity to explain what you know. Don't try to answer every question but don't avoid the tough ones either.

FOR TEACHERS

Hoping to start a debating club? Looking for ways to give your debaters more experience? Debating Matters have a wide range of resources to help develop a culture of debate in your school and many more Topic Guides like this one to bring out the best in your students. For these and details of how to enter a team for the Debating Matters Competition visit our website, www.debatingmatters.com

FOR JUDGES

Judges are asked to consider whether students have been brave enough to address the difficult questions asked of them. Clever semantics might demonstrate an acrobatic mind but are also likely to hinder a serious discussion by changing the terms and parameters of the debate itself.

Whilst a team might demonstrate considerable knowledge and familiarity with the topic, evading difficult issues and failing to address the main substance of the debate misses the point of the competition. Judges are therefore encouraged to consider how far students have gone in defending their side of the motion, to what extent students have taken up the more challenging parts of the debate and how far the teams were able to respond to and challenge their opponents.

As one judge remarked *'These are not debates won simply by the rather technical rules of schools competitive debating. The challenge is to dig in to the real issues.'* This assessment seems to grasp the point and is worth bearing in mind when sitting on a judging panel.



**“A COMPLEX
WORLD REQUIRES
THE CAPACITY
TO MARSHALL
CHALLENGING IDEAS
AND ARGUMENTS”**

**LORD BOATENG, FORMER BRITISH HIGH
COMMISSIONER TO SOUTH AFRICA**