

Vaccines: Myths and Confidence Crisis are Unwarranted

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Vaccines are among one of the most effective public health interventions in combating infectious diseases. It helps in prevention of morbidity, mortality and lessen burden on health expenditure against diseases such as diphtheria, influenza type b, measles, polio, pertussis, smallpox, and varicella. Recent news about substandard diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT) vaccine manufacturing in China, and contaminated polio vaccine in India had created an international debate on a potential health crisis.

In July 2018, Chan Sheng Biotechnology and Wuhan Institute of Biological Products, both Chinese vaccine makers, were found to produce substandard DPT vaccine (The Lancet, 2018). The substandard vaccine had been administered to total 615,704 children across China. Chan Sheng Biotechnology was also found to have fabricated production and inspection records while changing process parameters and equipment during its production of freeze-dried human rabies vaccines. An investigation was launched and Chinese authorities had detained 15 people from Chan Sheng Biotechnology, including the chairman.

In September 2018, an Indian vaccine maker, Biomed, was found to supply three batches of contaminated polio vaccine. There were about 150,000 vials in each batch. The vaccine was found to be contaminated with type 2 virus, while it was supposed to have only type 1 and type 3 viruses. The type 2 strain was withdrawn in 2016, after India was officially declared to be "polio-free" by World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2014. The contaminated vaccine had been withdrawn and officials of the company had been arrested. WHO had released a statement indicating the risk of vaccine-derived polio is minimal.

While these incidence should be seen as rare occurrence, but they instill fear among parents against vaccines. It discourages parents from immunizing their children against preventable diseases. It should be noted that each unvaccinated individual poses a risk for the community. A recent report from the National Immunization Survey, USA, indicate gradual increase, from 0.9% for children born in 2011 to 1.3% for children born in 2015, in the percentage of children reaching age two years without receiving any vaccination (Hill, *et al.* 2018). It accounts for parents' hesitation to get their children vaccinated (Siddiqui, *et al.* 2013).

With news, as mentioned above, led to deterioration in confidence with vaccines. The regulatory authorities and governments should put all their efforts to curb any incidence of adulteration and contamination of health related products in general and vaccines in particular. Restoring faith in vaccines will be a slow process and require a great deal of communication. Leaders and health professionals need to work together to allay any myth or fear with vaccines and advocate for vaccines forcefully.

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