

Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Hearing “Voices of the Vaccine Injured”
July 7, 2025, 3:00 p.m. Hart 216
Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal, Opening Statement

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and welcome to our witnesses and welcome to all of the visitors who have come to this hearing. I suspect we have diverse views in our audience and I welcome all of you, regardless of your views because I think all of your being here is immensely important to give voices and faces to what we will hear from our witnesses by way of their testimony. The loss of a loved one, as we all know, leaves an indelible imprint on our lives, creating an unfillable gap that is almost impossible to overcome at the time it happens and time sometimes heals, sometimes not. I feel deep empathy for the pain and heartache experienced by every person on this panel and I thank you for your courage, whatever your testimony is gonna be, courage and conviction in coming forward today.

Parents and loved ones should never have to know the type of heartache that comes with the loss of a child. And it's a loss which was common, all too common before vaccines were developed.

Smallpox killed approximately *500 million* people in the 100 years before it was declared eradicated in 1980. Ninety percent of deaths are believed to have occurred in children under 10 years old. But that risk was eliminated thanks to vaccines that led to smallpox becoming the only disease to have been completely wiped on the globe.

Parents—I will tell you, including my own, with my brother and me—used to live in fear of their children contracting polio. I will

never forget, one summer, when my brother had very high fever, all of the symptoms of polio, the anxiety level in our house was incomparable. I was barely old enough to understand what might happen. In bad years, 15,000 U.S. children were permanently paralyzed, permanently paralyzed. But again, thanks to vaccination, those fears no longer permeate our society.

Despite the enormous advances made over the last century, still far too people, many of them children, die of vaccine-preventable illnesses every year.

I'm reading a book right now called *Everything Is Tuberculosis*, it's by John Green. It's on the New York Times' Best Sellers List so I don't have to give you all of the details of information. It's about tuberculosis and about how treatments and medicine is available for tuberculosis, which could eradicate it. But for many of the deep suspicions and anxieties in developing countries. One of the characters in this book, it's nonfiction, is a young boy who at five years-old was stopped from treatment by his father because of his distrust for medicine and his reliance on other kinds of cures.

I am deeply grateful to Eric Stein, who lost his four-year-old sister, and to Serese Marotta, who suffered the tragic death of her five-year-old son, for their courage in coming forward to share their stories with us today.

Stories like theirs were once the norm. At the beginning of the last century, infant mortality in the United States was more than 100 times higher than it is today, and over 60 percent of those dead children succumbed to infectious disease. A century later, thanks to in large part to widespread vaccination, that figure dropped to 2 percent.

But as you will hear today, the fact that these deaths are now rare doesn't make them any less tragic. And every one of them is a tragedy for parents who survive. Parents like Kathryn Alcaide.

In January 2012, Kathryn's infant son Brady died in her arms from pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, at just two months old. And I would like to give her the opportunity to talk to you directly, recounting her unimaginable loss. And if you could play the video that we have.

Thank you Kathryn Alcaide. Someone else's decision not to get vaccinated likely caused her child to be taken away from her, devastating her family. I fear that stories like Kathryn's will become more and more common in the years ahead. This year, the United States is on track to record more cases of whooping cough than it has in seven decades. Already, at least three children have died.

And this disease is just the beginning. Rates of vaccination against a range of debilitating and deadly diseases have fallen rapidly in the last few years, driven by unfounded claims from opportunistic actors.

We are already paying a price. Twenty-five years ago, measles was declared eliminated in the United States of America. But barely halfway through this year, our country has more cases of measles than it has had for more than three decades. Three people, two of them children, are dead. And I have a poster with some of the measles headlines.

These headlines help tell a story that, in detail, is being lived by Americans. And these deaths are made even more tragic by the fact that they were totally and completely preventable. The measles vaccine is safe and effective. It's not only been proven though

clinical tests, trials, but by everyday experience of Americans. There have been persistent falsehoods about vaccines continuing to harm our communities. And this misinformation is not only driving down vaccination rates. It is compromising research into the very harms that we need to prevent.

Nowhere is this point clearer than with autism. Decades of scientific research have shown *conclusively* that vaccines do not cause that autism.

At this time, I would like to enter into the record six scientific papers that have scientifically shown that vaccines do not cause autism. If there's no objection, Mr. Chairman.

[*Chairman Johnson: No objection.*]

They're here. Anyone is free to look at them.

These include studies done over decades involving hundreds of thousands of children, and a comprehensive analysis from the National Institute of Medicine concluding that epidemiological studies, quote, "*consistently provided no evidence*" of association between vaccines and autism.

This epidemiological research is important and persuasive. Autism research is critically important and has made great strides in recent years. Yet every dollar we devote to studying this thoroughly debunked claim is a dollar taken away from much more promising research; a dollar taken away from educators in special needs classrooms; a dollar taken away from caregivers to help overwhelmed parents.

The truth is that, for children born in the United States between 1994 and 2023, routine childhood vaccination is estimated to have saved well over one million lives.

The truth is that telling parents to use cod liver oil to stop measles, rather than vaccines, has sent innocent children to the hospital with vitamin A toxicity.

The truth is that, in the past decade, over 42,000 women in the United States have died from cervical cancer—a cancer that is almost entirely preventable by the HPV vaccine.

Today, vaccines in a way are a victim of their own success.

Parents today do not have to spend terrified nights at in the hospital wondering what will become of their child with diphtheria, a disease that, until a vaccine was developed in the 1940s, regularly killed as many as 15,000 children a year.

Or rubella, which until a vaccine was developed in 1969, regularly infected more than 50,000 people, resulting in tens of thousands of babies born deaf, blind or with congenital heart disease.

We cannot afford to turn back the clock. Scientific advancement has given us great benefits. We need to make sure that every medicine, every vaccine, every treatment, or cure available to Americans goes through proper testing and clinical trials and is proven to be safe and effective. Nobody wants Americans exposed to side effects or dangers as a result of any medical treatment. But we should be mindful of the benefits. After they are proven safe and effective, the scientifically proven benefits.

And I want to thank our witnesses for coming forward today to share your views, your stories. We look forward to learning from you, and working to make America safer and healthier. Thank you Mr. Chairman.