

Ounce of Prevention COMMUNITY COMMENT April 21, 2016 Mike Goldsby

How much is an ounce of prevention worth? Most of you know the answer; a pound of cure. But it is interesting how often people resist the investment of an ounce of prevention. And then complain about the cost of a pound of cure.

Take vaccines for instance. Vaccinations are typically number one on the top ten list of Public Health achievements in the last century. You know, up there with clean water. Vaccinations are one of the biggest contributors to our longer life expectancy.

Older folks typically understand the value of a vaccination but younger generations are now questioning that. I imagine they have never seen a person with polio and they do not know what an iron lung is. We understand vaccinations are important for our pets. In other countries, rabies kill a lot of dogs and people as well, a situation that is extremely rare in the United States because of animal vaccinations.

Vaccinations are the victims of their own success, so effective that it is easy to minimize the need. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recently issued a report called **BE WISE: IMMUNIZE**

In this report, they point out that Humboldt County has one of the lowest childhood immunization rates in the State, ranking 54th out of 58 counties. The Grand Jury encourages parents to look up the immunization rates at local schools by going to the website shotsforschools.org

On the page, go to the left column, and click "How many students in your school have their required shots?" You can search by zip code or school name.

The Grand Jury concluded that transportation barriers contribute to these low rates. That is possible, except some of the lowest ranking schools are close to healthcare providers. And some very remote counties have higher rates of immunization than Humboldt.

Hank Sims and Ryan Burns with the online Lost Coast Outpost have done a stellar job of exploring the scientifically proven benefits of immunizations and the illogical belief system of the Anti-Vaxxers. Sims believes it is not transportation but belief in debunked theories that leads local parents to somehow think vaccines are the problem, not the cure.

Part of the blame goes to the falsified study that claimed vaccines were linked to autism. The British physician who published that 1998 study was stripped of his license, the British Medical Association has labeled the study fraudulent and no reputable researcher has been able to find any association between vaccines and autism. Yet the myth lives on, in the Internet and with some misinformed celebrities and politicians, including Jim Carrey, Jenny McCarthy, Rob Schneider, Charlie Sheen and even Donald Trump.

So what is the problem if people don't immunize their kids? Aren't they only hurting themselves? Well, I mean, their own kids? The harm is that diseases like measles and pertussis, known as whooping cough, show up when vaccination rates go down. Many people survive these diseases, but some don't. Even the flu kills people every year, usually infants and the elderly. Ounce of prevention sounds cheaper to me.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment.