



Childhood Diseases

The Childhood Diseases

Dorothea Lange had polio as a child and thereafter suffered from a severe limp. Many childhood diseases that could kill or disable children have been eliminated due to vaccinations created since the 1950's.

Assign groups to investigate the common diseases virtually eliminated in the 20th century – at least in the western world, due to the creation of vaccines, and report their results to the class. The whole concept of vaccines in a sense began with the creation of the smallpox vaccine, which could be added to the list and even meningococcal disease which strikes teens and young adults in university dorms and can cause brain damage or even death.

1. Polio - In 1955 Jonas Salk developed the vaccine for polio. Before then nothing scared parents as much as the word “polio”. It would strike in the summer and move through an entire town because it was highly contagious. Most victims would survive, but many would die or be crippled for life. It has no cure, so the vaccine is very important.

2. Whooping Cough – named after the sound of the child trying to breathe where it sounds like a whoop. Before the vaccine this was treated by having using a steam kettle, putting a towel over the child's head to breathe in the steam, and using Vicks VapoRub as an inhalant.

3. Measles – Mostly kills under the age of 5. This is caused by a virus and appears as red spots around the face, arms, back, etc. After infection you have no symptoms for 10 days. The rash spreads from the face down the trunk to the legs and feet. The fever rises. Complications include: an ear infection possibly leading to impaired hearing, croup which is an infection of the bronchial tubes treated the same way as whooping cough, or encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain causing brain damage.) Prior to the vaccination being invented in 1963, almost all children got measles before they were 15. You stayed at home until all the symptoms went away.

4. Mumps - The first mumps vaccine was in 1963. The three vaccines (measles, mumps, rubella) were made into one MMR vaccine. Mumps appears as a swelling of the salivary glands most often in children from 5-9 years old. Adults who contract mumps (who were not vaccinated as children) will often become infertile, meningitis, inflammation of the brain, total hearing lost can be the consequences.

5. Rubella - (also called German Measles) appears as a rash and lasts for about three days. It can cause loss of hearing and brain inflammation. If an uninoculated woman is exposed to mumps in the first trimester of a pregnancy, she will have a child with heart problems, deafness, and brain damage. (This is the plot point in Agatha Christie's *The Mirror Cracked From Side to Side*.)

6. Diphtheria - is a bacterial infection that starts with a sore throat. It is possible that it will block the airway causing a croup-like cough. Complications can include kidney problems, bleeding problems, paralysis, and an abnormal heart rate. Before the vaccine, in the 1980's there were about a million cases a year, world-wide – now down to 4500 in 2015.

7. Smallpox - is a virus that is extremely contagious, deadly, and incurable. People could be healthy in the morning and dead in the evening. The vaccine was introduced by Edward Jenner in 1796. The last known case in the USA was in 1949 and since then this disease has been basically eradicated across the world.

8. Chickenpox - a virus that causes a painful rash. Adults in particular who do not get the shingles vaccine and who develop shingles often experience extreme pain, where they cannot even put on a shirt.

9. Meningococcal Disease - a virus that can go into the blood or even infect the brain lining. It is often caught by teens and young adults living in dorms, or in the military, where the close contact can cause the virus to spread quickly.