

The extensive socioeconomic benefits of vaccines

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The socioeconomic benefits of vaccines entail avoidance of health care cost because the disease is averted estimated by calculating cost-effectiveness. But vaccines also increase economic productivity among adults because absenteeism from illness or dependent care is avoided and fewer people die in the productive age groups. The improvement in health and in nutritional status that results, especially in poor countries, leads to better school performance, higher cognitive ability, and more school years, all of which result in greater economic productivity. Vaccination programs also avert the fear, dread, and anxiety that results when an epidemic occurs. For diseases such as SARS, the economic decline that resulted from the epidemic in Hong Kong primarily resulted from people avoiding stores and public gathering places and tourism dramatically declined. Vaccination programs that specifically reach the poor, raise the health status of the lowest 40% of the population dramatically improving health equity. Herd immunity which results from many, but not all vaccination, also increases the benefits of vaccination. Benefits are usually underestimated because the statistical value of each life saved is usually not included. This is always included in the value of an environmental toxin prevention program or in transportation safety programs. This omission results in substantial undervaluation when compared with many other health promotion programs and may lead to lack of societal investment in vaccines.

The presentation will provide many examples of how these benefits are valued and will present models that demonstrate the additional societal socioeconomic benefits when all of these features are included.

Biography

Dr Julia Walsh MD, MSc is Professor of Maternal and Child Health and International Health and teaches and researches health system financing and economics of health interventions

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