



## Sample Op-Ed Piece on Polio and Vaccines

Whatever happened to polio? Today, 50 years after the introduction of the first polio vaccine, polio has been removed from our national consciousness and parents in the United States rarely give a thought to a disease that was once an obsession. However, we must not forget that before the vaccine became available, we used to have, on average, more than 16,000 cases of paralytic polio each year in the U.S.

"Safe, effective, and potent"—these words, on April 12, 1955, announced to the world that the Salk polio vaccine was up to 90% effective in preventing polio. The development of the vaccine by Dr. Jonas Salk and his colleagues was an accomplishment that ended an era of global fear of a dreaded contagious disease and, in the process, reshaped the conduct of science, the funding of science, and the public's role in the support of science. These efforts forever changed the way that public health was administered, and advanced the general understanding of ways basic scientific research benefited humanity through collaboration between academic, philanthropic, and government institutions.

The fight against polio brought together communities in a national collaboration that at that time was the largest human cooperative effort in history. In the days leading up to the vaccine's approval, children in communities across the United States participated in the field trials as America's "Polio Pioneers." These "Pioneers" proved that a vaccine could prevent the paralyzing disease. Thousands of healthcare workers and lay people volunteered their time to assist with the vaccine field trials. Millions of Americans participated by raising funds in their communities to support the larger research effort and a single goal: victory over polio.

Polio was eliminated in the United States because protecting the public's health was perceived as a simple necessity, and every effort was made to see that the vaccine would be freely distributed and polio would be eradicated. We have made great progress in a very short time. We now have the means to protect our nation's children against terrible diseases, such as polio, that in the past caused great suffering, disability, and premature death in the U.S; yet polio still exists in Asia and Africa. In a continually shrinking world, polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases are only a plane ride away.

Vaccines have been one of the most important health gains in the past century. Infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases; that is why it is critical that they are protected through immunization. The benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks. Children who are not immunized increase the chance that others will get the disease. Since this effort 50 years ago, we can now protect children from more than 12 vaccine-preventable diseases, and disease rates have been reduced by 99% in the United States. Immunizations are extremely safe thanks to advancements in medical research and ongoing review by doctors, researchers, and public health officials; yet without diligent efforts to maintain immunization programs here and strengthen them worldwide, the diseases seen 50 years ago remain a threat to our children.