

Vaccines still are essential

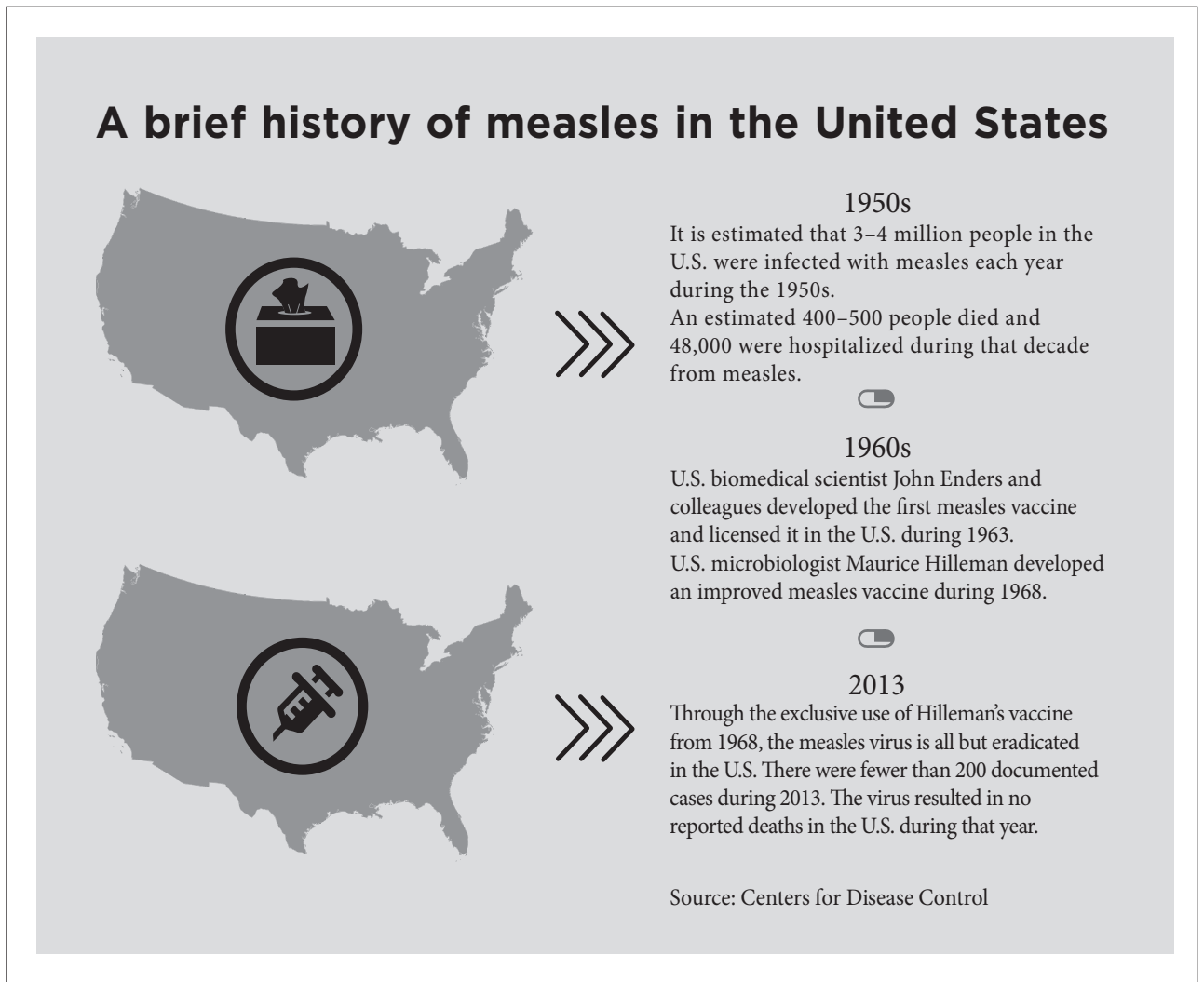


Robert Overmann
Editor-in-Chief

Quick quiz — who knows what's best for your health? Is it — A. you, B. your best friend, C. your physician or D. your crazy uncle who distrusts modern medicine? If you answered anything but "C," go to your doctor and ask for a prescription for some common sense.

Trillions of dollars spent on research, untold hours devoted to developing new treatments, and billions of premature deaths have been our society's costs in the fight against contagious diseases. However, a small, vocal and often otherwise educated segment of the population is threatening to undermine our society's progress against once-great scourges like tuberculosis and measles. One of the most important things you can do to prevent deadly, unstoppable outbreaks of disease is to obey your medical provider's advice to the letter about which vaccines he or she recommends.

Take smallpox — a disease that no physician in the world has seen for more than three decades after the last known natural case was resolved during 1977 in Somalia, according to the World Health Organization. Smallpox devastated human populations — the infamous Antonine Plague from A.D. 165-180 — is suspected to be a smallpox epidemic that killed almost seven million people and as much as one-third of the Roman population in affected areas, according to a January 2005 Baylor University Medical Center Proceedings study. Then, English physician Edward Jenner invented the vaccine, humanity's greatest weapon against viral diseases during 1796. Jenner's vaccine, developed from secretions of a dairy maid's cowpox lesions, proved effective and led to the eventual eradication of smallpox from the



world, according to the Baylor University Medical Center Proceedings study.

Measles, diphtheria, pertussis, rubella, mumps and more used to be diseases every child was expected to weather as recently as last century. Although these diseases no longer are common, they haven't disappeared. There were only nine cases of rubella reported during 2012, according to the Centers for Disease Control. With such few cases in a population of more than 300 million, some parents — many of whom are too young to remember epidemics ravaging the U.S. population — are electing not to vaccinate their children because of unfounded fears that vaccines cause other complications like autism, according to the CDC.

However, these parents should realize vaccines don't protect just themselves and their children. These parents effectively are making a decision to endanger others around them. Mass vaccination has conferred herd immunity to the U.S. population against these preventable diseases — since the vast majority of us are vaccinated, we can protect those who cannot get vaccinated for medical reasons because vaccinated people cannot be carriers of the diseases they are vaccinated against.

If we chose to stop vaccinating against these diseases, there is a significant likelihood they could

return, especially among the most vulnerable who can't get vaccinated for medical reasons. For the sake of fair comparison, we'll look at rubella again. Before significant herd immunity against rubella, an epidemic of the disease ravaged the U.S. during 1964-65 — the epidemic infected 12.5 million Americans, killed 2,000 babies, and caused 11,000 miscarriages, according to the CDC.

Although I never knew a world ravaged by diseases like polio, rubella, mumps, and smallpox, I have read stories about what these diseases can do to human beings. I have seen photos of late President Franklin Delano Roosevelt permanently crippled by polio and I have seen photos of children's entire bodies covered by a rubella rash. I even have met an older student at this very University who was blinded by complications from measles during childhood.

Listen to your doctor, think of others and get vaccinated. A world where preventable diseases kill and maim on a grand scale isn't far behind us, and it sure isn't one I want to return to.

Robert Overmann is a senior English major from Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Don't let a singular trait define you



UmmeKulsoom Arif

When I first came out as asexual, I talked about it incessantly. Seriously, my friends likely were sick of it. But in my defense, I'd finally found a term that defined my sexual orientation and didn't involve a liberal use of the word "freak." And with the definition came the realization that I wasn't alone — someone had defined this term because there were others like me — which then led to the discovery of a support group online and amongst my friends. It was a transitional period, and afterwards I had something more to be proud of.

But while it's important to be proud of who you are, it's also important not to let that pride define you. When it comes to sexuality — and oftentimes gender identity, but that's another topic for another time — being reduced to a definition sadly is all too easy.

It's easy to pretend to be something you're not, but that's not what being proud of yourself is about. It's also easy to fall into a pattern — to become a stereotype. But that's not what being proud of yourself is about either.

Your sexual orientation — whether you are straight, gay, bisexual, neither or any other part of the spectrum — is important. It's a huge part of who you are. But it's not all of it. Don't ask if you're "gay enough" or anything of the sort. You and your sexuality are uniquely connected — there's no manual on how to be a good representation of your particular sexual orientation.

This sounds so easy, doesn't it? It sounds like basic stuff. Be yourself.

Take pride in yourself. Be happy. Unfortunately, it's never that simple.

You've heard it. "Oh, I have a gay/bi/ace friend!" or "My gay/bi/ace friend..." Both place sexual identity in a position that is superior to the person of said sexual identity. Both are extremely damaging. You have a name. You deserve to be called by it. Not "my gay friend" or "my lesbian pal" or any of those things.

And this is important for straight people too. Most people consider heterosexuality to be the norm — which opens up another door full of problems relating to what's normal — but seem to insist on a strange "code of conduct" that damages everyone on the spectrum of sexuality. In the same way some straight people like to use stereotypes to define who's homosexual or what being bisexual entails, some non-heterosexual people use the "code of conduct" to insult and deride straight people.

We take the "sassy gay friend" trope for granted, but how many actual "sassy gay friends" have you met? The ones

who flip around their feather boas, wear oversized glasses and, for some reason, talk with an overpronounced lisp? I don't think I've met a single one.

Or what about the "butch lesbian" trope? Granted, tomboyish women exist, but what is it about being lesbian and being feminine that doesn't mesh? The stereotype is, lesbians who wear lipstick are just sorority girls doing it for the attention. Granted, that might be because of the mistaken assumption that women wear makeup for men and men only, but I digress.

These are just two common stereotypes, and I could go on about how bisexuals are viewed, or how asexuality and pansexuality are almost entirely erased from discussion and movements. The simple end of it all is, take pride in who you are. Take pride in your identity. But don't let the identity and its stereotypes define who you become.

UmmeKulsoom Arif is a junior justice systems major from St. Louis, Mo.

AROUND THE QUAD

What did you do over Spring Break?

I just went home and spent time with my family.

Erin Biddle
Senior



I went to St. Louis and stayed at my friend's house. We hung around.

Anh Nguyen
Sophomore



I went to Dallas, Texas, and stayed at my aunt's house.

Katia Pallais
Freshman



I went to Panama City Beach with some friends. It was pretty crazy.

Casey Wright
Junior

