

A SHOT IN

**What does a mother do when vaccination time comes round?
Do what doctor says? Or give it some careful thought...**

by Annette Taylor

I took my daughter, Jessica, for her first visit to the doctor when she was 7 weeks old. She'd been born at home and I felt sure the doctor would smile and goo over her, reinforcing my feelings that here was truly a healthy, fit baby.

When I emerged from the surgery, 15 minutes later, I was upset, the day ruined for me. Apart from the doctor's disapproval of a home birth, she was mortified that I didn't allow her to vaccinate Jessica for diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus.

I said I wanted time to think it over and she reluctantly let me, adding there was a whooping cough epidemic in New Zealand at that time and "I wouldn't want to be responsible the death of my baby".

The visit got me thinking. Should Jessica receive all her vaccinations, at the time recommended, or could they pose a threat to her?

I had heard of a group in Auckland who were opposed to immunisation. What were their reasons?

As it turns out, the facts are far from clear. The Health Department is criticised for cooking statistics, and accused of having tunnel vision, while the anti-immunisation lobby is regarded by some as a bunch of emotional and

scientifically illiterate flat-earthers. One doctor who has a reputation in the Waikato for questioning mainstream medicine is Te Awamatu general practitioner Janion Heywood, who agrees the issue is anything but simple.

"We're dealing with muddied water. I say to my patients I'm uncertain about the effects of vaccination, and I can't promise that their child will be protected from the disease or that it won't be harmed from the vaccination process," she says.

Dr Heywood is concerned about what vaccination is doing to the immune system. "Our knowledge is incredibly humble, it is still a developing science. It might be a case of swapping 1 set of ills for another. There might be an increase in disorders such as otitis media (middle ear infection).

"We're never going to eradicate everything, something else will always bubble up. We're just one species on the planet – we don't have mastery. Doctors like to think they can prevent and cure things, but I believe there might be a spin-off, a price you pay for more and more immunisations."

Dr Heywood feels people do not get the whole story from the Health Department and advises anyone who is uncertain to get both the official

Health Department literature and information from the Auckland-based Immunisation Awareness Society Inc.

"People who don't vaccinate because of a New Age philosophy or alternative life-styles, thinking it's not natural so they won't do it – I don't agree with that. It has to be a positive, informed decision, rather than a negative one, in the same way that the decision to vaccinate has to be a positive one."

But, as with Humpty Dumpty in *Alice In Wonderland*, words seem to mean only what people want them to. With immunisation, the advice and information you get depends on who you speak to.

For Waiora Waikato (Health Board) Medical Officer Harry Nicholls there is no issue. The only, and best, decision, is to vaccinate against all diseases, he says.

He believes we're becoming complacent about some of these diseases – whooping cough, diphtheria, polio – because they just aren't around as much as they used to be. On his desk, he keeps a 15-minute video which "would change many people's minds into getting their kids vaccinated".

Diphtheria is a case in point. In 30 years in the medical profession, Dr

