

## What is Our Global Attitude to Vaccinating?

Rudolf Steiner, Physiology and Healing, Treatment, Therapy and Hygiene

Georg Soldner, May 29, 2019, Forest Row

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On 15 April 2019 the Medical Section and the International Federation of Anthroposophic Medical Associations (IVAA) responded to multiple requests from anthroposophic physicians and published a statement on the question of vaccination. Georg Soldner, deputy head of the Medical Section, explains the circumstances of this statement.

In the global vaccination campaigns anthroposophic physicians are often vilified as ‘anti-vaxxer’ and, using this accusation as a pretext, efforts are even being made to ban Anthroposophic Medicine altogether. On the other hand, there are one-sided campaigns that oppose vaccination indiscriminately.

Given this situation, the attempt has been made to keep the discussion factual and protect Anthroposophic Medicine against one-sided attacks and generalizations. It soon became evident that, in some countries, the statement was very important for the public image of Anthroposophic Medicine and that it was welcomed accordingly. Others expressed clear criticism, often based on misunderstandings. I will therefore explain the joint statement, paragraph by paragraph.

### The Need to Differentiate:

“Vaccines, together with health education, hygiene and adequate nutrition, are essential tools for preventing infectious diseases. Vaccines have saved countless lives over the last century, for example, they allowed the eradication of smallpox and are currently allowing the world to approach the elimination of polio.”

*Elaboration:* Good communication requires, in the first instance, recognition and positivity where they are due. Our colleagues in India, for instance, emphasize how much some vaccinations have contributed to reducing child mortality in their country.

“Anthroposophic medicine fully appreciates the contribution of vaccines to global health and firmly supports vaccination as an important measure to prevent life-threatening diseases. Anthroposophic Medicine is not anti-vaccine and does not support anti-vaccine movements.”

*Elaboration:* This says clearly that we are talking about vaccinations for life-threatening diseases, in which mumps and chicken pox are not necessarily included, while – in the global context – the measles jab has saved the lives of many children.

The statement clearly rejects any indiscriminate anti-vaccine movements. While many believe in and disseminate the view that the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccination has caused an epidemic increase in autistic disorders. This does not mean, however, that there is sufficient evidence of this vaccine being totally safe. Because the measles vaccine is a live vaccine it can contribute to the positive maturation of the immune system (in poor countries it also reduces the mortality rates of other diseases).

### National Recommendations:

“Physicians who are trained in Anthroposophic Medicine are expected to act in accordance with national legislation and to carefully advise patients (or their caregivers) to help them understand the relevant scientific information and national vaccination recommendations. In countries where vaccination is not mandatory and informed consent is needed, this may include coming to an agreement with the patient (or the caregiver) about an individualized vaccination schedule, for example by adapting the timing of the vaccination during infancy.”

*Elaboration:* This paragraph refers to national vaccination recommendations as well as scientific information. The latter may well contradict the national vaccination recommendations, which differ

from one country to the next. After several deaths have occurred, France, for instance, no longer recommends to vaccinate babies against diarrhea (rotavirus) – unlike Germany, where not one (of more than a hundred) daily newspapers reported on these fatalities even though the complications are known to German scientists.

It has been criticized that the statement does not clearly condemn mandatory vaccinations. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the statement is a global one. There are regions in the world where child mortality is high, along with poverty levels, and there are situations in the context of major refugee movements, where mandatory vaccinations against life-threatening pathogens seem to be justified. But even in countries where mandatory vaccination has been introduced without sufficient cause (as in Italy or Hungary), it is not necessarily helpful to publish a global statement on Anthroposophic Medicine that includes views on questions of vaccination. This does not mean that the statement defends mandatory vaccinations. The opposite is the case.

The statement explicitly mentions the informed consent of parents or patients and emphasizes their right to make an informed decision not only regarding vaccination itself but particularly also regarding the time when it should be given. Scientifically speaking, vaccinating children under the age of one against measles – as recommended in Switzerland (from the age of nine months) – will have the effect that many will no longer be protected as adults.

Aluminum-containing dead vaccines – against tetanus and diphtheria for instance – are suspected to increase the risk of asthma and the susceptibility to infections if given in early infancy, in very poor countries they are even suspected to increase the overall mortality from infections.

### Pro-Science:

“Taking into account ongoing research, local infectious disease patterns and socioeconomic risk factors, individual anthroposophic physicians engage at times in the scientific discussion on specific vaccines and appropriate vaccination schedules. Anthroposophic Medicine is pro-science and continued scientific debate is more important than ever in today’s polarized discourse on vaccination.”

*Elaboration:* The statement emphasizes that vaccinations have to be judged against the background of the actual health challenges in the individual case (climate, poverty, crowded living, malnutrition etc.). Anthroposophic physicians and their patients enhance their chances of being listened to by the civil society, health authorities and politicians, if they express differentiated and informed views on questions of vaccination. A polarizing debate, on the other hand, where powerful economic interests and a certain fanaticism play into each other’s hands, destroys the foundations of a freedom that is rooted in the free spiritual life and that needs to be defended in the sphere of rights, in the civil society.

### Asking About the Meaning of Illness:

*Elaboration:* The question that remains is that of the meaning of illness – a question that is rarely asked today. Acute febrile illnesses are certainly important for the maturation of the child’s immune system and we can support this by not giving antipyretic drugs or unnecessary antibiotics, by providing an appropriate diet and competent nursing and medical care. Anthroposophic physicians support such an approach and are increasingly listened to by experts. Fever helps children not only to overcome an infectious disease but also to individualize their organism.

It is a fact that measles are globally considered today to be too dangerous. But there are many febrile infectious diseases that can be well controlled medically. A healthy child development is possible without measles if children grow up surrounded by love, good food, sunlight, and if they receive appropriate care and treatment when they develop a fever.