

How far does vaccination prevent against small-pox? / by J.T.C. Nash.

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BOROUGH OF SOUTHEND-ON-SEA

HOW FAR DOES VACCINATION PROTECT
AGAINST SMALL-POX?

BY

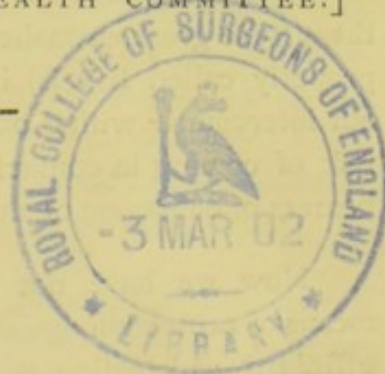
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Medical Officer of Health.

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT,

December, 1901.



HOW FAR DOES VACCINATION PROTECT AGAINST SMALL-POX ?

Smallpox and Vaccination.

In view of the epidemic of small-pox in the great City with which we are in daily intercourse, I feel it a public duty to say here that the best way to keep this dread disease out of our Borough is for each inhabitant to do his and her best to promote cleanliness, firstly and naturally in our own persons and homes. If, as individuals, and a community, we are clean, we need not dread infectious diseases. This, then, is the first great principle to keep in mind. I should however, be failing in my public duty if I did not impress upon you again that the cleanliness of your own person and home will not necessarily ensure you from acquiring infective disease, unless you are sure that everyone else with whom you come into contact is also clean. Now even in our own Borough there are, unfortunately, some (I am afraid I must say a considerable number) who are not clean. We try our best to induce these people to become clean. The standard of cleanliness with some of them is so low that they consider themselves clean, and are very indignant if it is suggested that they could be cleaner. In other cases we occasionally are obliged to put the machinery of the law into action to compel a certain degree of cleanliness. In the great City of London so vast is the number of unclean people that we actually designate them "the great unwashed," and the condition of some houses (more properly called hovels) is such as to almost defy description. In our intercourse with London, some of us must, therefore, run the risk of coming in contact with the unclean, and possibly, with the bearers of contagion of small-pox.

Now we have not until quite recently enjoyed any reliable means of protection against the majority of infectious diseases, but in **efficient** vaccination, with lymph procured from a reliable source,

we have a means of protection against small-pox which has stood the test of nearly a hundred years. It is not my intention to open up a controversy on this subject, nor to refer to the usual statistics, dealing to a large extent with unknown factors, such as "said to have been vaccinated," "vaccination not stated," etc.

"Stronger evidence of the value of vaccination is afforded," as pointed out by Dr. W. R. Smith, "from a consideration of the number of persons employed in connection with the small-pox hospitals in London, and the number of those who contracted small-pox ; it being remembered that the Asylums Board insist upon the vaccination or re-vaccination of such persons." The staff newly employed during the last ten years has numbered over 1,200 persons, but there is **no record of a single person, after having been satisfactorily re-vaccinated before entering upon duty, having contracted small-pox.** "Be it noted that no similar immunity from the fevers, including diphtheria, admitted to the institutions of the Board is obtainable, for not a year passes without the loss of valuable lives from such diseases contracted by nurses or others in the performance of their duty."

The fact is, therefore, that in spite of its admittedly great infective power, **small-pox is the safest disease and freest from danger to the efficiently vaccinated** nurses and other members of the Asylum Boards staff whose duty brings them in close and frequent contact with the cases in all degrees of severity.

The point I wish to impress on you is this. If you want to be properly protected from small-pox see to it that you are **efficiently vaccinated.** If your arm does not "take" the first time, do not buoy yourselves up with the false belief that you are not susceptible to small-pox. It is much more probable that the lymph used on you was inert. Insist upon being vaccinated again with lymph which has proved active on someone else. **An unsuccessful vaccination or re-vaccination should always be regarded with great suspicion and should on no account be considered as proof that the subject is insusceptible to small-pox.**

Another point is this. As a general rule, efficient vaccination confers an immunity which lasts for a considerable time, it may be for years, but **the immunity gradually lessens.** It may be con-

sidered absolute for a year or two, and then it gradually becomes less complete. Therefore to ensure absolute immunity in face of an epidemic, recent efficient re-vaccination is essential. Vaccination is our first line of defence against small-pox. The exigencies of life and business necessitate our coming into contact at times with the unclean and contaminated. By being vaccinated, we not only protect our own bodies from a loathsome disease, but our homes and borough from many a probable source of introduction of small-pox. If ever the time comes when all people and towns are clean, the necessity for vaccination will pass away. In the meantime it is a public duty. Compulsion should not be necessary. Each person should feel it his duty to his neighbour and his fellow townsmen to be protected from being a source of introduction of so hideous a disease.

