

**DEADLY CHOICES: HOW THE ANTI-  
VACCINE MOVEMENT THREATENS US ALL  
BY PAUL A. OFFIT**

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**PAUL A. OFFIT, M.D.**

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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In the second book this season (after journalist Seth Mnookin's *The Panic Virus*) to attack vaccine paranoia, Offit—who drew antivaccinist fire for *Autism's False Prophets*—presents a smart, hard-hitting exposé of vaccine pseudoscience. Offit brings outstanding credentials to the subject: he's a vaccinologist at Children's Hospital in Philadelphia and an expert in infectious diseases, and he tackles claims that childhood inoculations cause brain damage, autism, diabetes, and cancer, finding a farrago of misinformation, faulty research, and sly deceptions fed to distraught parents by media hype, ax-grinding activists, and personal-injury lawyers. He embellishes his account with a sprightly history of paranoid medical populism—19th-century critics of the cowpox-derived smallpox vaccine insisted it could turn people into cows—and a blistering attack on celebrity antivaccine ideologues Jenny McCarthy, Jim Carrey, and Bill Maher and the medical writers who pander to parental anxieties. Offit dwells less than Mnookin on the sociology of the controversy and more on the science. The result is a thorough dismantling of antivaccine notions and a sober warning about the resurgence of deadly childhood infections stemming from declining vaccination rates. Worried parents, especially, will find this a lucid, compelling riposte to antivaccine fear-mongering. Photos. (Feb.)

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There's a silent, dangerous war going on out there. On one side are parents, bombarded with stories about the dangers of vaccines, now wary of immunizing their sons and daughters. On the other side are doctors, scared to send kids out of their offices vulnerable to illnesses like whooping cough and measles--the diseases of their grandparents.

How did anyone come to view vaccines with horror? The answer is rooted in one of the most powerful citizen activist movements in our nation's history. In *Deadly Choices*, infectious disease expert Paul Offit relates the shocking story of anti-vaccine America--its origins, leaders, influences, and impact. Offering strategies to keep us from returning to an era when children routinely died from infections, *Deadly Choices* is a vigorous and definitive rebuttal of the powerful anti-vaccine movement.

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Most helpful customer reviews

64 of 73 people found the following review helpful.  
a must read for those on BOTH sides of the argument

By Word Nerd

I spied this book at our local library and knew I had to read it. I am no stranger to the controversy regarding vaccination, as it is a frequently discussed topic in the homeschooling community. Our small group is split fairly evenly between those who never miss a recommended immunization and those who would never consider any type of immunization. Fortunately, amongst our group the disagreement is amicable. (One of the things I love about homeschool- independence is valued!)

I will freely admit that I am in the pro-vaccine court. I know that side effects- even death- are possible, but in weighing the potential damage from a vaccine and potential damage from disease....well, immunization seems the lesser of evils. I expect that those who choose differently go through the same painstaking inner dialogue, they just end up in a different place. I'm okay with that.

This book is also solidly pro-vaccine, but I think it does a pretty decent job of presenting the pros AND cons

of the situation. There have been situations where vaccines were contaminated. There have been situations where vaccines were just a bad idea (live polio virus). And, there have been situations where disease has swept through unvaccinated communities at an alarming rate. Offit covers all this and more, without the intense fear mongering often found in this type of manuscript. A person so inclined could skip the commentary and just read the studies presented.

He does seem to be a bit harsh when speaking about those in the anti-vaccine movement. I can certainly grasp that he thinks they are making a mistake without the thinly veiled references to their moral character. He might garner more respect from that camp if he offered it up himself!

My verdict: Read it! This book does a very good job of presenting the science behind vaccines and how it has changed over the years. Regardless of what side of the argument you choose, *Deadly Choices* can provide you with the facts to bolster your opinion. Although I feel it is an important enough societal issue to warrant everyone reading this book, it is a **MUST** read for parents.

259 of 335 people found the following review helpful.

a compelling history of vaccines and anti-vaccine movements

By D. Simons

The focus of *Deadly Choices* is on the history of the introduction of new vaccines and the anti-vaccine movements that tend to follow. Offit is a prominent virologist and he doesn't hide his scorn for some in the anti-vaccine movement. His book is unlikely to change the minds of anyone who is firmly within that movement, but I'm not sure what would. The book is a must read for anyone interested in a detailed, well-written, and thoroughly sourced discussion of the scientific basis of vaccines, the real and imagined risks of vaccination, and the consequences of the choices we make about vaccines.

The politics of the vaccine debate are powerful, and they often overshadow the substance. It's remarkable how many people managed to read and write "reviews" of this book within 2 days of its release on December 28. A few even managed to review the book before it was released! Given that few of these reviews mention anything about the book's contents, I suspect many of the reviewers, both positive and negative, have not read it.

I actually have read the book. Given that I had written about the vaccine/autism debate in the past (from the perspective of trying to understand the sorts of evidence people use when drawing causal conclusions), I requested and received a review copy of the book from the publisher 6 weeks before its publication.

Not surprisingly, the book thoroughly documents some of the unfounded claims that the anti-vaccine movement has made and explains the biological reasons why some of the perceived risks of vaccines either are not a risk or physiologically **CAN'T** be a risk. For example, many of the "green our vaccines" campaigns are based on the concern that there are nasty chemicals in vaccines, which is true. As Offit notes, though, it's not the substance that's the problem, it's the dose. Even water is toxic when taken in a large enough dose (on occasion, college students die during frat hazings when required to drink too much water at once). Most of the substances that scare people away from vaccines (e.g., aluminum and formaldehyde) are in our bodies and blood stream all the time. Our foods contain them, and the quantities in vaccines are relatively negligible. Similarly, babies are exposed to countless bacteria and viruses, so the fact that children get a seemingly large number of vaccines does not mean that those vaccines tax the immune system at all (Offit also notes that it's not the number of vaccines, but the number of elements within those vaccines that require an immune response).

The book is not one-sided. The first chapters discuss all of the well-documented cases of actual vaccine

injury and the real side effects of vaccines (e.g., the live polio vaccine could cause polio, although most vaccines don't use live viruses). The book uses these tragic cases to document how the CDC and regulatory agencies now catch really rare side effects that didn't show up in the large-scale testing necessary for approval (side effects that are 1 in a million sometimes don't show up in testing with 50,000 people). Vaccines undergo more rigorous testing than other drugs, and the mechanisms in place to detect rare side effects work far more effectively than they do for other drugs. In order to introduce a new vaccine into the recommended schedule, testing must show that it doesn't interact in any way with the remainder of the schedule.

Offit also discusses some of the things that vaccine safety advocates could do (but haven't done) to help make vaccines safer. For example, people who have egg allergies cannot get vaccines that are made using chicken eggs (e.g., flu vaccine). There might well be alternative ways to make such vaccines, but the pharmaceutical industry has no financial or government-initiated incentives to develop those alternatives. Vaccine safety advocates could push them to do so.

Offit makes the case that anti-vaccine movements raise fears of vaccines that are inconsistent with the science. In so doing, he draws parallels between current anti-vaccine claims and those made over a century ago after the introduction of the smallpox vaccine. Many of the fears of that vaccine are laughable by today's standards (e.g., that children would develop cow-like facial features because the vaccine was initially taken from cows infected by cowpox). But Offit argues, fairly convincingly, that the logic and nature of current anti-vaccine scares are largely the same as those raised over a century ago and in each subsequent anti-vaccine movement. He also shows that most of the anti-vaccine proponents as well as self-identified vaccine safety advocates (including Dr. Bob) lack any relevant background in virology, epidemiology, or statistics, and that they typically lack the training to evaluate the actual risks of vaccines.

The most compelling chapter is the last one, in which Offit describes what happens when someone who could not be vaccinated (because they were too young) comes into contact with an infected child whose parents decided not to vaccinate. The choice not to vaccinate affects people other than your own child--it puts young infants and others whose bodies lack a typical immune response can't be vaccinated at risk. The chapter is reminiscent of the recent PBS Frontline documentary on vaccinations.

At times, the book can be a bit heavy handed in its tone--Offit's perspective is clear throughout, and he doesn't hold his punches. Sometimes his parallels between historical anti-vaccine movements and current ones are a little forced, and in a few cases, the book is perhaps a bit more dismissive than is necessary. For example, in passing Offit implies that all chiropractors reject the germ theory of disease. Although a rejection of the germ theory might have motivated chiropractors at the start, I'd hazard a guess that most present-day chiropractors accept the germ theory of disease. Overall, though, the book presents the scientific evidence in a compelling, comprehensive, thoroughly documented, and engaging way.

For prospective parents whose prior information about vaccines comes from friends, the internet, or even their pediatrician, this book is a must read by one of the top scientific experts in the field. It provides the background and evidence you need to evaluate claims about the dangers and benefits of vaccines and to make the best choice for your children AND your community.

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

A must read for any parent concerned about vaccinating their children.

By Ben Johnson

A great source of factual information for any person concerned about the safety of vaccines.

The author explains in plain English, the scientific facts behind all of the arguments raised by the anti-

vaccine advocates.

A must read if you are considering not vaccinating your children.

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Michael Specter, Staff Writer, *The New Yorker*; author of *Denialism*

“With *Deadly Choices*, Paul Offit has once again brought clarity and reason to a subject that desperately needs them both. If you care about the health of your children – or the health of anybody’s children – you need to read this book as soon as you can.”

Robert M. Goldberg, Ph.D., Vice President, Center for Medicine in the Public Interest and author of *Tabloid Medicine: How the Internet is Being Used to Hijack Medical Science for Fear and Profit*

“This is a courageous book by a courageous researcher and physician. Paul Offit’s new book tells the truth about the anti-vaccine movement, its unquestioning followers in the media and about the deadly consequences of their campaign of fear. *Deadly Choices* demonstrates that the enemies of immunizations are successful because too many of us have remained silent in the face of their falsehoods and intimidation. Dr. Offit shows that by standing up for science we can win the war against those who would leave our children defenseless against infectious disease.”

Steven Novella, Assistant Professor and Director of General Neurology, Yale University School of Medicine

“Dr. Offit brings to life in careful and compelling detail the story of misguided and dangerous activists using bad science to attack one of the most effective public health interventions ever devised. It is a must-read cautionary tale of the abuse of celebrity, the media, misinformation and fear.”

Chris Mooney, author of *Unscientific America*

“Paul Offit is that rarity: An eloquent, outspoken scientist with a gift for writing narrative. I cannot imagine a better counter to the scientifically challenged—and just plain dangerous—anti-vaccination movement. We’re fortunate to have him.”

Kirkus (starred review)

“Offit takes aim at the anti-vaccine movement in America and scores a bull’s-eye.... A much-needed book with solid evidence – deserves all the publicity it can get.”

Booklist (starred review)

“Infectious disease expert Offit, long an outspoken and prolific champion of universal immunization via vaccines, ratchets up the urgency of his crusade by taking on the loudest and highest-profile spokespersons for the anti-vaccine movement.... Armed with his own arsenal of anecdotal horror stories that focus on worst case histories of the unvaccinated, mostly children, in addition to pages of scientific study citations supporting his premise, Offit pulls no punches. His tone is edgier than usual this time, his arguments more virulent. It is clear that he wants his message and the facts, not rumors or infectious diseases, to go viral.”

#### Science News

“In a meticulously researched tour de force, Offit exposes the lack of science underlying the claims of the anti-vaccine movement.... In 2009 and 2010, U.S. courts ruled against claims linking autism with vaccines. Still, many vaccine opponents aren’t persuaded, and they have talk show access and Hollywood friends. To level the playing field, every doctor’s office should have a copy of Offit’s book, giving parents the other side of the story.”

#### Financial Times

“Offit... is a rare combination of scientist, doctor, communicator and advocate. In *Deadly Choices*, he powerfully lays out the history of vaccinations and their net benefit to society today.”

Journal of the American Medical Association “*Deadly Choices* masterfully presents the history of the antivaccine movement, which finds its origin in the time of Edward Jenner, and provides a devastating rendition of the antiscientific mentality that animates the celebrities and physicians alike who grant this movement moral legitimacy.... It is my belief that when new histories of vaccination’s prowess are written, Offit will be mentioned in the same breath as Edward Jenner, Louis Pasteur, Maurice Hileman, Jonas Salk, Albert Sabin, Baruch Blumberg, Max Theiler, Robert Austrian, and the other giants of vaccinology who have incalculably benefitted humankind.... I recommend *Deadly Choices*, in the highest possible terms, as an anecdote and tool to fight for the glory of vaccines. The survival of humankind depends on it.”

Locate the key to improve the quality of life by reading this **Deadly Choices: How The Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All By Paul A. Offit** This is a sort of book that you need currently. Besides, it can be your favored publication to review after having this book *Deadly Choices: How The Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All By Paul A. Offit* Do you ask why? Well, *Deadly Choices: How The Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All By Paul A. Offit* is a book that has different unique with others. You could not have to recognize which the author is, just how popular the job is. As sensible word, never judge the words from who talks, but make the words as your inexpensive to your life.