



Film Screenings

Forgetting to Remember – Lessons from a Vaccine Lost

Film Comprehension Questions

Why does adenovirus infection in the military matter?

Military readiness is of paramount importance. When a vaccine was not available, adenovirus infections were interrupting training and decreasing the number of available soldiers. Likewise, some soldiers died from their infections.

Why do public health professionals caution against only focusing on diseases when they become a problem?

Disease prevention is a cornerstone of public health. First, this approach prevents unnecessary suffering and keeps the population healthier overall. Second, treatments are not always an option. Third, outbreaks are more difficult to stop the more cases that occur. Finally, treatment is typically more expensive than prevention if available at all.

Why was the adenovirus vaccine originally discontinued?

Only one company, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, produced the vaccine for the military, who was the sole customer for the vaccine. After an inspection, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required the company to upgrade their equipment in order to continue making the vaccine. When the military failed to provide the needed funding for the upgrades, Wyeth abandoned production of the vaccine.

When the vaccine ran out, what was the next best option?

Military doctors implemented mitigation strategies to try to thwart adenovirus infection, such as heightened disease surveillance, separating the sick from the well, and increasing hand hygiene, but these measures were not nearly as effective as vaccination, and as a result, many recruits contracted adenovirus and some died.

Why did it cost so much to restart the adenovirus vaccine program?

When the FDA approves production of a vaccine, it is not only approving the safety and efficacy of the final product, but also the manufacturing process and the facility. When production of an existing vaccine stops and the manufacturing lines are shut down, the FDA views any new effort to restart production of that vaccine as a new product since the manufacturing process and facility are different. This is both expensive and time consuming, particularly since the FDA must license not only the product, but also the facility where it is made and the protocol by which it is produced.

What distinction does measles have compared to other diseases, and what are some of the serious risks associated with measles infection?

Measles is the most contagious disease of humans. It can cause a very high fever and a painful, full-body rash. It may also cause pneumonia, dehydration, and, in some cases encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), which can result in blindness or deafness. Tragically, some children die of the infection.

What does it mean to have measles elimination status in the United States?

“Measles elimination” means that measles virus is not spreading continuously in the U.S. Sporadic or imported cases can still occur, but because enough people are immune, spread of the disease is limited. Immunity comes from infection or vaccination.

Vaccination played an important role in our ability to eliminate measles from the U.S., so if immunization rates decrease enough, measles will be more likely to spread on a continuous basis.

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