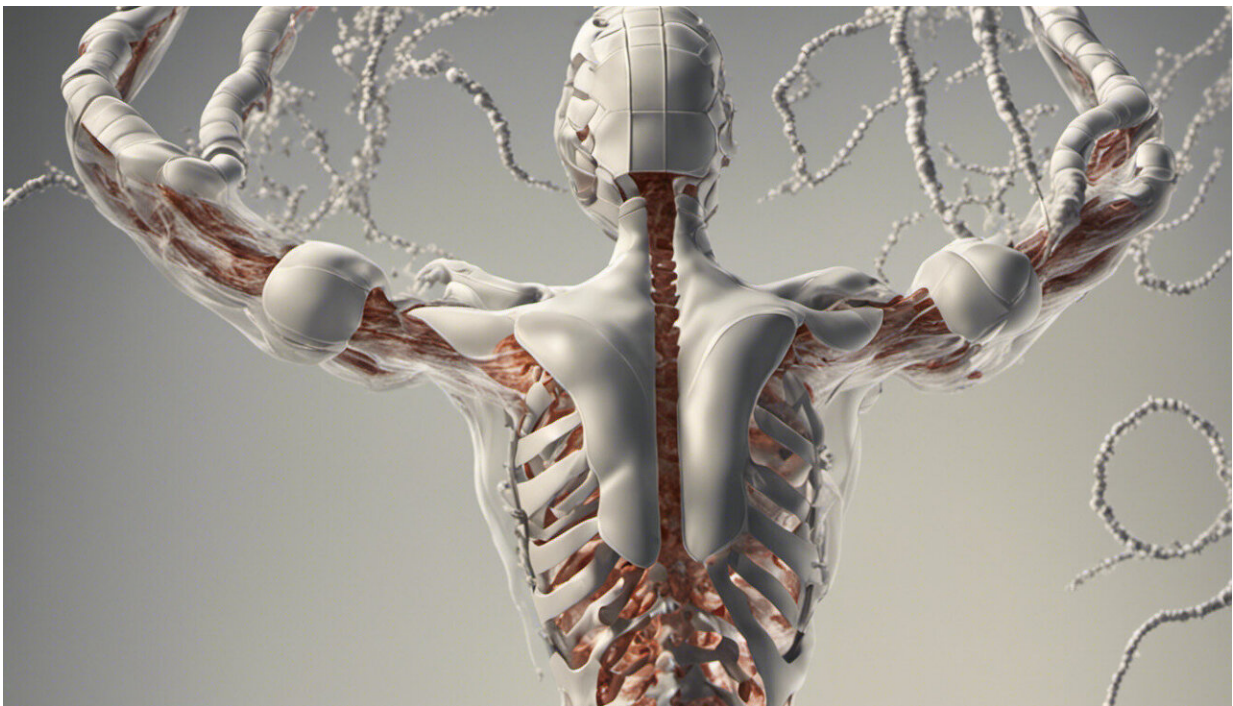


# Vaccinating children—why peace of mind should not be forgotten when it comes to funding

February 6 2020, by Gemma Lasseter

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Vaccinating children against serious diseases is a complicated process. Even after all the scientific discoveries and developments, there are important decisions to be made by parents and politicians.

In the UK, government policy on whether to fund new vaccines, or modify their availability, is based on advice from an [independent scientific advisory group](#). This involves weighing up the benefits and costs, and then deciding whether a [vaccine](#) is value for money.

The idea is to find a balance between the cost of doing something (such as routinely vaccinating all children against a particular disease) and how much benefit you get from doing it (such as health gains by preventing disease and the associated economic savings).

Yet the current approach does not take into account many of the benefits that vaccinations offer and which [set them apart](#) from other health interventions. The fact that vaccinations are preventative rather than curative, for example, or that they offer long-term protection and increased [peace of mind](#). This, in turn, could mean that vaccines are at a disadvantage compared with other [health interventions](#) when it comes to making decisions about funding.

## Vaccination factors

[Previous research](#) suggests that parents make decisions about childhood vaccinations according to a mixture of social and personal factors. Social factors include societal norms and moral beliefs. Personal factors include perceived effectiveness, the risk of infection, side effects, and ease of access.

The [peace of mind](#)—a sense of wellbeing and reassurance—that comes from getting a child vaccinated could be another important personal factor. But little research has been done in this area, so the potential benefit is not currently considered by decision makers.

[Our research](#) investigated "vaccine associated peace of mind" by discussing the topic with members of the public to see whether it was a

factor in their experiences of vaccination.

We found that peace of mind was dependent on an individual's knowledge about the benefits of having a specific jab. Feelings of reassurance were linked to knowing that once vaccinated, their child was protected against a disease. But for those few who considered vaccinations a routine health intervention, peace of mind was not mentioned.

Participants in one focus group said that the longer a vaccine had been available, the safer it felt to them. They spoke of being reassured by knowing a vaccination had been used for many years.

There were some exceptions. For example, although the [MenB vaccine](#) (given to offer protection from life-threatening infections including meningitis and blood poisoning caused by meningococcal group B bacteria) was considered relatively "new" by many participants (it was [introduced in 2015](#)), it brought increased peace of mind because of the severity of the diseases it prevented.

## **Parental concerns**

Peace of mind was also found to vary over time. Although it was linked to knowledge about health benefits, or to reassurance received from [healthcare providers](#), it could all be diminished by short-term concerns relating to the pain or distress their child might suffer when receiving an injection.

Also, certain vaccines offered less peace of mind if a parent had only experienced a mild form of the disease as a child, or had no personal experience at all.

Many of the parents we spoke to said that making vaccination decisions

was a complex process, with each person choosing to vaccinate (or not) by balancing their beliefs about the benefits versus the potential risks. Some mentioned feelings of anxiety about making the wrong decision.

For most, the amount of peace of mind they reported was linked to their opinions about the severity of a disease and possible susceptibility. But concerns about vaccine-associated side effects were also found to reduce peace of mind.

Overall, the research found that vaccine associated peace of mind—although it varied in magnitude and duration—was a valued benefit for some people when making vaccination decisions for their children. This suggests that the current economic approach used to make funding decisions may not be enough. When it comes to improving public health, peace of mind should be considered in the future.

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