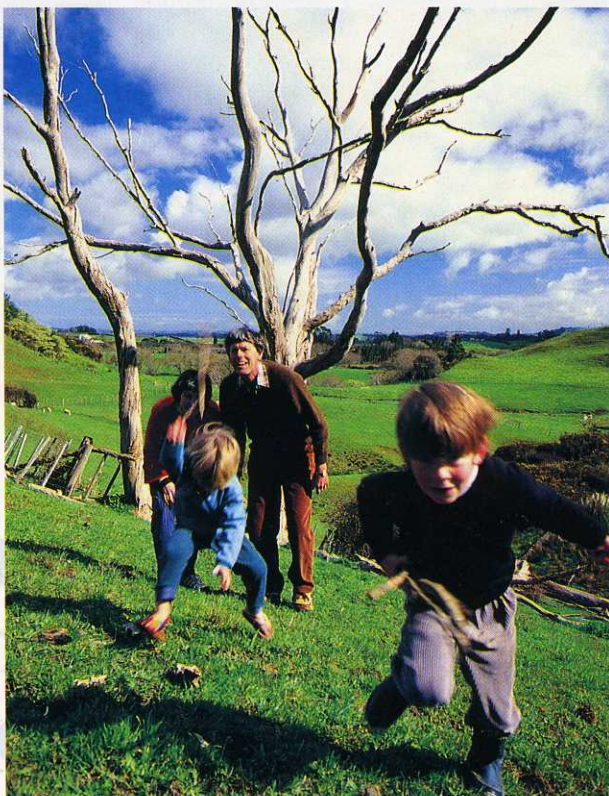


Would you choose not to immunise your child against polio? Or tetanus? Or whooping cough? Or meningitis?



GIVING IT HER BEST SHOT

Hilary Butler's children aren't immunised. She is a crusader you see. She thinks we don't actually need so much mass immunisation. She's prepared to say so, publicly, and to back her opinion with research. Some people are listening. Others think she's paranoid.

BY SIOUX BENNETT

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IN 1973, 19-year-old Hilary Butler had her first rubella shot, the vaccination now routinely given to New Zealand girls in Form One to prevent them catching rubella during any future pregnancy.

Within two weeks she developed very sore knees and elbows and "carpal tunnel syndrome", a condition causing pain and swelling around the thumbs. When she eventually consulted a doctor, Hilary was told "when you have a history of doing crazy things like gymnastics you can expect problems, things wear out", and until 1986 she accepted what she was told.

Seven years later, Hilary had a blood test to determine whether she had rubella antibodies.

"That was okay," Hilary recalls. "Then I got pregnant with Ian, our first son, and in the second month there were problems. I lost weight instead of gaining it, I thought I was going to die."

Last year, Hilary read her medical file from that time, which contained the results of blood tests done at the time. The results showed there was evidence she had had rubella.

Hilary was shocked, so shocked she decided to do some investigating herself to find out how someone could get rubella even when they had the antibodies.

She uncovered some research done in 1973 which showed 93% of people successfully vaccinated who have antibodies may later get rubella.

Shock turned to anger. Hilary went back to her doctor and asked for tests to find out just what had been wrong with her, and why she was still suffering aches and pains.

"He said he didn't really know what to test me for, but ran a few anyway and they did show up some immune system abnormalities."

Still dissatisfied, she bundled up her medical history and sent it off to a doctor in the United States, who replied stating Hilary had a classic case of "rubella vaccine syndrome, which may develop in 14 out of every 100 people vaccinated".

Hilary Butler was confused. Why hadn't she been told she wasn't necessarily protected from rubella and why hadn't she been told about this side effect syndrome, she demanded.

It wasn't the first time she'd questioned medical procedure — Ian's birth hadn't been the smoothest either.

"When you have your first child you tend to do what everyone says. You do what is deemed to be the right thing, go to hospital and do what you're told. I felt my delivery was mismanaged and the staff thought I was being stropy. I was just trying to protect Ian."



Hilary, her husband Peter and the boys. David and Ian are active, happy, well fed and cared for children who haven't had a serious sick day in their lives.

Some time later Hilary was at a La Leche meeting where she met a paediatrician. Hilary's doctor had asked her what she was going to do about immunisation "and with Ian having so many needles poked into him already I thought 'well, what am I going to do!' So I asked this woman, expecting a nice, pat, easy-to-understand answer. She asked if I was breastfeeding and I said yes and she told me to forget about it until he was on solids and to ask her again then."

Hilary left it at that until her doctor pursued the issue and told her the paediatrician's advice was wrong. Suspicious, Hilary talked to a few other doctors and was astounded to discover they all held different views.

"So — remembering my jaundiced attitude — I decided to go to a medical library and look at their literature and

ask around about immunisation . . . is it good, bad or whatever . . . because my doctor just kept saying wonderful! wonderful! No problems."

BUT IT WASN'T that simple, as Hilary found out, and she began to defend a growing personal disbelief in a quest to uncover *all* the facts about immunisation.

"It took two years for a proper picture to come through that there was an awful lot being suppressed. Then I heard about a doctor in America, Robert Mendelsohn, who's also doubtful about immunisation, and asked if he'd send me his newsletters — and from there it just snowballed."

So much so that at considerable personal and financial cost, matter-of-fact Hilary Butler, living in Tuakau, wife of Peter and mother of Ian and David, has

become an almost full time researcher into immunisation and its effects. She writes under the name IRON, Independent Research On Non Immunisation, to provide information for anyone interested.

What she's not, despite media labels, is anti-immunisation.

"We won't immunise our children because we live in a country where we have the right not to do that. The thing I mainly object to is that the information given to parents is so one-eyed and it's time people were told the whole truth. People aren't told things — like that the incidence of most of the diseases we have immunisations for dropped 80-100% *before* vaccines were introduced. And that good sanitation and diet have done wonders for the human race. They are just told how health professionals consider vaccination the saviour of mankind."

Hilary's aim is to provide non-aligned research which is credible, can be verified at source, is as accurate as possible and which can be used as a basis to balance what she regards as the unbalanced view of the Health Department.

She attempts to present information from medical literature from both sides. And as she told a Home Birth Conference in May, "I aim to provide information which will reassure people who don't want to immunise their child that there is every reason to suppose they will survive without it; that the evidence used by the medical profession to support its view is flimsy and much of it unproven.

"Most doctors like to think they know all there is to know about immunisation and that we mothers know nothing — and what's more, couldn't understand it anyway."

While that might sound cynical, Hilary believes she has the evidence to prove she *does* understand it and further, believes immunisation as practised in New Zealand is contributing to declining general health. The basic harm in having children immunised, she says, has two parts.

