

How vaccines could have saved a life

By Libby Nelson, Vox

British author Roald Dahl is best known for his beloved, weird classic children's books – Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Matilda, and James and the Giant Peach among them. But one of the most powerful and frightening things he ever wrote was for a public health pamphlet on vaccination, where he described the death of his eldest daughter due to complications from measles.

Dahl writes about how his daughter seemed to be recovering well from what was then a common childhood illness, and suddenly took a turn for the worse. “In an hour, she was unconscious,” Dahl writes. “In 12 hours she was dead... there was nothing the doctors could do to save her.” (Despite medical advances since 1962, encephalitis is still an incredibly dangerous complication that can cause brain damage or even death.)

Dahl ends the story with a call for others to vaccinate their children that still resonates 52 years after his daughter's death. “It is not yet generally accepted that measles can be a dangerous illness,” he writes. “Believe me, it is. In my opinion parents who now refuse to have their children immunized are putting the lives of those children at risk.”

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