Jeroen Luyten and Philippe Beutels
‘Egocentric’ vaccination: the authors reply

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Reply Luyten-Beutels,

We are grateful for the opportunity to clarify this issue. We were using the VZV example to illustrate the variety of distributive effects of vaccination programs and to discuss potential intergenerational inequity as an additional layer of complexity for vaccine policy making. We used the term ‘egocentric’ to conceptualize the difference with ‘altruistic’ vaccination, depending on how benefits and risks are distributed over vaccinated and non-vaccinated parties.

In biomedical terms we believe there is sufficient evidence to show that exogenous boosting of immunity against Varicella-Zoster Virus (VZV) exists, but not in all individuals and in all circumstances where an exposure to chickenpox occurs.[1] We fully acknowledge that there is disagreement on this, and that there remains high uncertainty about the extent of the population-level impact of childhood VZV vaccination on herpes zoster incidence. We therefore referred to an extensive systematic review that reflects and grades the diversity of the evidence.[1] Despite a discrepancy in strength of evidence – a definite highly beneficial, immediate and lasting impact on chickenpox cases, hospitalisations and deaths in children versus a temporary rise of uncertain magnitude in herpes zoster disease in older generations – this issue has contributed to postponing the introduction of childhood VZV vaccination in many countries. We provided ethical arguments to overcome this issue elsewhere. [2]

We are aware that anti-vaccine lobbyists may use article fragments out of context, but we believe that should not stop us from holding academic discussions in a spirit of openness.
