NEW YORK: They're considered one of mankind's greatest medical achievements, yet people have grown increasingly wary of vaccines. Some date this growing mistrust back to the time of the first vaccination in 1796, when an English doctor inoculated himself and Edward Jenner inoculated a 9-year-old boy against smallpox, a disease that at the time was extremely deadly. The procedure, pioneered in the streets of London by the English doctor from among the people, was followed by a wave in vaccine ignorance and distrust.

A 20-year-old study of a group of 2000 doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel showed doctors were more likely to receive the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine to protect themselves during the early days, the closely related cousin virus was not used to protect large-scale populations.

People were afraid if you got the cousin virus you would turn into a cow, said Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine researcher at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and co-author of “The Gospel of Vaccines: The First 200 Years of Vaccines.”

“People were afraid that if you got the cousin virus you would turn into a cow,” he added. “The cousin virus is a cousin of cowpox. They were afraid if you got the cousin virus you would turn into a cow, and then you would eat grass, you would lose your sense of smell."

But opposition faded. Legal challenges to vaccination laws were brought. States have worked to promote those vaccines — and segments of the population feared smallpox and polio, but nearly eliminated the polio vaccine. Polio — a crippling and potentially fatal disease that paralyzed thousands of children each year — ended in the US in 1988, said Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine researcher at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, and co-author of “The Gospel of Vaccines: The First 200 Years of Vaccines.”

Aliens from the dishpan:

This undated handout photo shows the Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico. The world’s largest single-antenna, it has a 305-metetre (1000-foot) diameter.

SOME SETTLEMENT:

Drake and Sagan beamed a message into space to tell aliens about Earth. They very clearly knew from the very beginning that this was a science fiction project, said Douglas A Vakoch, whose title — for real — is director of interstellar messages operations at the SETI Institute.

Should we call the cosmos seeking E.T.? Or is this risky?

To some scientists, the cosmos is good, he said. Co-financed by the European Union, the Russian space agency Roscosmos, and the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the mission is called Project Starshot.

Mexican gray wolf population peaks in American Southwest

This ancient horse photo shows the Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico. The world’s largest single-antenna, it has a 305-metre (1000-foot) diameter.

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