

## Origins of the Word “Vaccine”

By Shlomo Maital



When Google counts “most searched words” for 2020 -- vaccine will be way up there in the list.

Ever wonder where the word vaccine came from? Here’s the story, by Johanna Meyer, contributor to the Science Friday podcast of Ira Flatow.

It began with Dr. Edward Jenner, who most people know discovered that cowpox could vaccinate against smallpox – and saved many lives. Johanna Meyer continues:

So here’s where we get the word vaccine. Edward wrote up his findings in a report called an Inquiry Into the Causes and Effects of the Variolae Vaccinae. In Latin, Variolae means pustules, and Vaccinae means, essentially, something that comes from a cow. So Variolae Vaccinae basically means cow pustules, or cowpox. And for a long time, the word vaccine was used specifically to talk about using cowpox to prevent smallpox. It wasn’t until almost 100 years later that it came to mean more. And it was thanks to Louis Pasteur. He was a really big fan of Edwards, and he wanted to kind of honor him. So when Pasteur created the rabies vaccine, he suggested that we start using the word vaccination to mean any time we inoculate against any infection, just like we use the word today.

Those who speak French know that cow is ‘vache’ in French – and French, a Latin language, has Latin roots. Vache = vaccine. Voila.

So next week, when I get the second Pfizer-BioNTech vaccination shot against COVID-19, I will think of Edward Jenner and his daring experiment. By the way – today it would not be possible. Jenner first injected the eight-year-old son of his gardener with the cowpox virus -- with his dad’s permission, but highly unethical today as a human experiment.

p.s. the illustration above is “la vache qui rit”, the laughing cow, a French brand of cheese...