Reviewer’s report

Title: Risk of serious complications and death from smallpox vaccination: A systematic review of the United States experience, 1963-1968

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Reviewer: William C Thompson

Level of interest: A paper of considerable general medical or scientific interest

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

1) Abstract - Need to summarize what the inclusion criteria were for the initial 348 studies and the seven studies that met your final inclusion criteria.
2) Background - Needs to be edited. For example, many instances where the word risk should be plural.
3) Methods
   Explain why you didn't do additional literature searches before 1965 using data sources other than Medline.
   Explain why the Neff criteria were used.
   Explain why the abstractors were not blinded. Otherwise drop that sentence.
   Describe why the age groups were selected. For example, it would be been interesting to see data for persons aged > 50 years. My guess is that there are not any data broken out by those age groups.
4) Results
   Provides a nice summary of the data.
5) Discussion
   The discussion is too long a should be shortened.
   Second paragraph could be dropped.
   The limitations section is too long.
   On page 18, the authors agree with the CDC authors who did not combine risk estimates for the 2 Lane studies, but the authors of this paper did combine those estimates. Big contradiction that needs to be addressed.
   1st Paragraph on page 19 could be cropped.

Competing interests:

None declared.