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## COMMENTARY

Painful Questions of Blame  
Parents, Doctors And The Disputed Link Between Vaccines And AutismBy Meg McSherry Breslin for the Chicago Tribune <http://tinyurl.com/q3ngd>

It has been nearly 50 years since mothers shouldered the blame for their children's autism. Yet for many parents, echoes of that painful era remain. In the 1950s and '60s, the medical community accepted University of Chicago psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim's assessment that "refrigerator mothers"—those with a supposedly cold, unloving demeanor—brought on their children's disorder. Although we now know that autism is a neurological disorder and not the result of bad parenting, the exact cause remains a mystery. Many parents, however, are convinced they've found the answer. And most experts are on the opposing side. Indeed, few medical battles are more charged than that between parents who believe mercury in their children's vaccines brought on autism and the medical establishment that has found no evidence to support that claim.

Not only do these families feel enormous frustration with the many doctors who dismiss their theories, but they sometimes blame themselves for what happened while also struggling with the terrible stress of caring for an autistic child. This sensitive issue was brought into sharp relief last month after a 37-year-old Peoria area doctor was charged with first-degree murder in the death of her 3-year-old autistic daughter, who was suffocated. Police say the doctor confessed to the murder, though she has entered a plea of not guilty. Friends of Karen McCarron said the murder charges came as a shock. Still, many said they recognized emotional turmoil in McCarron in the months before Katie's death. Allowing her daughter to be vaccinated, and feared that the available remedies wouldn't make enough of an improvement to her daughter's quality of life. Others suggest that perhaps working among other doctors skeptical of the vaccine connection created an emotional tug of war for McCarron.

"I just think she had a lot of guilt," said Dr. David Ayoub, a radiologist and associate professor at Southern Illinois University who occasionally talked with McCarron. Ayoub is a leading supporter of the mercury-causes-autism theory and is trying to dig up evidence to prove it. Much of the passion surrounding this issue stems from the fact that autism can be one of the most difficult disorders to manage. Though cases range from mild to severe, the toughest ones can be harrowing for parents, some of whom have to watch their children constantly for fear they will jump in front of a car, bang their head against a wall, or lash out at others. Some parents describe the most extreme cases as being like having a hyperactive 2-year-old who never grows out of his impulsive, risky behaviors.

Understandably, parents want the mysteries that surround autism to be settled, to have some answer for why the number of cases has exploded. Having the medical community discount their beliefs makes them feel as if all hope of their children improving has been stripped from them. "All of us have been told pretty much the same thing," said Christina Blakey, an Oak Park mother whose 6-year-old son has autism. "The doctors all say this is very, very serious and this is a very debilitating disorder. There is no cure and there are no treatments. So we're at odds with the medical community now."

Like other parents who believe in the mercury connection, Blakey says some acceptance of their theory might lead to better treatment of their children. She and other parents say that once they began looking at their children as being poisoned by mercury, their approach to autism treatment changed and their children began getting better. After Blakey found a Chicago-area doctor willing to work with her son on a controversial treatment called chelation therapy—which removes mercury and other toxic metals from the body—she saw dramatic change in her son's behavior. She said a wheat- and dairy-free diet has also produced positive changes, yet many doctors she initially consulted were skeptical. The idea that mercury in childhood vaccines causes autism has circulated for years, with parents saying their children were developing normally until they received certain vaccinations.

But the American Medical Association, the Institute of Medicine and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others, have concluded there is no scientific data to support a mercury-autism link, despite an exhaustive review of cases worldwide. Nonetheless, mercury has been phased out of most childhood vaccines, although some parents say the move is too recent to determine what effect it might have on autism rates. While recognizing parents' frustrations, some doctors say they don't engage in mercury-related treatments because they're obligated to stay away from unproven remedies that could do more harm than good. Chelation, for instance, could strip the body of essential minerals as well, said Dr. Bennett Leventhal, a University of Illinois at Chicago psychiatrist, an expert on autism and the director of an Illinois task force on the disorder. Furthermore, Leventhal is convinced mercury does not trigger autism. "If mercury was the cause, we'd be all over it," he said. "It might help shed some light on what areas of the brain are damaged and it might give us some clues to the genetic susceptibility and help us find some answers. But unfortunately, it just isn't turning out to be the case."

Laura Schreiberman, director of the Autism Research Program at the University of California at San Diego and author of the 2005 book "The Science and Fiction of Autism," says intense behavioral therapy is the only proven treatment to improve the effects of autism. But she understands why parents are drawn to alternative therapies designed at drawing out mercury. "There's a lot of distrust that families have with the scientific community," she said. "But it all boils down largely to the fact that we don't have the answers. I can't tell you what causes autism. Meanwhile, parents continue to make their case, reaching out to lawmakers, government officials and physicians to tell their stories. + Read more: <http://tinyurl.com/q3ngd>

## LETTERS

Re Column by Meg Breslin, Vaccines and Autism  
(See reprint of article above.)

I am glad you have decided to take on this controversial topic, but I want to clarify some of the comments Meg made, particularly about my own involvement, which I think are misleading. First, I am no longer "trying to dig up" evidence to prove vaccines cause autism. There is already abundant evidence, the same conclusion made by a 2003 US Congressional Committee. This debate is not scientific, but is political. I am trying to encourage physicians who have been badly misled by nothing less than spin and propaganda to review the extensive scientific evidence for themselves showing the vaccine-autism link, even though "experts" disagree. I am also lobbying to get mercury removed from vaccines. The statement indicating mercury "has been phased out of most childhood vaccines" is a gross distortion of the truth." The flu vaccine contains a very large amount of mercury and the number of flu shots given to children has increased dramatically since 2004. Contrary statements are commonly provided by public health officials and representatives from the American Academy of Pediatrics, an organization receiving tens of millions of dollars from drug makers, when in fact, the only thing that counts is HOW MUCH cumulative mercury is still being given to children in vaccines. In 1999 it was 237 micrograms in the first 4 years of life, in 2003 it had dropped to below 5 micrograms, but today it is back up to 125 micrograms when you include prenatal flu vaccine exposure. On a weight-adjusted basis, the exposures really have not declined at all.

The "passion" you spoke of that provides my motivation does not come from the fact that this disorder is difficult to manage. Many illnesses are difficult to manage. The passion comes from the fact that 1) this is a preventable disorder 2) we are still harming children by injecting them with 11-16 times the amount of mercury the EPA considers safe 3) the disorder is treatable. Everyone in your column that denies the link in fact has a conflict of interest or strong bias to NOT believe it is a vaccine issue.

There are many peer-reviewed papers on the success of treating children through a variety of interventions, mostly dietary and biological supplements aimed at treating measurable biochemical abnormalities. If autism was a psychiatric disorder, then why do children have abnormal laboratories in dozens of tests that evaluate the immune system, biochemical derangements, nutritional deficiencies, infectious agents and toxicological abnormalities to name a few. Autism is beyond the expertise of psychiatrists and psychologists who can only use behavioral therapy or drugs to treat. It is no wonder they say there is no treatment, because their methods are limited. Many "experts" such as Dr. Leventhal, are consultants for the drug industry and have very strong bias to NOT even consider the science that threatens their livelihood. If it were to be accepted that autism is a toxicological disorder, patients would leave their practices in search of appropriate biomedical therapies.

This is a financial conflict of interest. he idea that mercury is associated with a neurodevelopmental disorder is not restricted to parents. There are over 500 physicians in the US treating children and improvements can be substantial and total reversals are possible. This is not a "wishful thinking" statement coming from a parent, but from a physician who has witnessed this happening first hand. Unfortunately, the media is the victim of the same propaganda and has been badly led away from the truth. When the mystery of childhood "Pink disease" in the 1950's was proven to be physician-endorsed mercury poisoning through teething powders, the disease disappeared following its removal. Over 50 years later we have made the same mistake once again, patiently waiting for media to step up to the plate and look at the evidence critically and tell the truth to the American public. Please tell both sides of this important story.

- David Ayoub, MD Director, Prairie Collaborative, Ltd, An Illinois not-for-profit organization Springfield, Illinois

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0503/S00089.htm>David Ayoub - Thimerosal Definite Cause Of Autism **Friday, 11 March 2005, 11:47 am**  
**Opinion: Evelyn Pringle**David Ayoub MD - Thimerosal Definite Cause Of Autism  
By [Evelyn Pringle](#)  
Miamisburg Ohio

To what degree of scientific certainty can we prove that current epidemic of autism was caused by the mercury-based preservative, thimerosal, in childhood vaccines?

In response to this question, David Ayoub, MD, told Independent Media TV, "I can state that the certainty of the science supporting mercury as a major cause of autism is probably more overpowering than the science behind any other disease process that I studied dating back to medical school."

"I think a disease that effects more individuals than AIDS or cancer, in previously normal infants and children," he states, "has created a sense of urgency amongst researchers."

According to Ayoub, "A growing number of experimental, epidemiological and biochemical research, has unequivocally shown that mercury is directly linked to the development of autism spectrum disorders and is significantly toxic to the gastrointestinal, immunological, metabolic and neurobiological systems in children."

"The science of causality is known and understood down to the manner in which mercury impairs the neural pathways of attention," he adds, "I really don't see the need for more research to prove causality." He believes the focus should be "directed towards methods to remove mercury from the body and repairing those biochemical systems that are injured by mercury."

Ayoub is the Director of the Prairie Collaborative for Immunization, an organization that is self-funded, which aids organizations, journalists, and legislators obtain accurate information to assist their work. He is also the author of the report, "Pregnancy and the Myth of Influenza Vaccination-Is it safe, is it effective, is it necessary? What the CDC documents reveal."

**Vaccines With Thimerosal**

When asked what vaccines still contain the mercury-based, thimerosal, Ayoub said, "The major culprit today is the influenza vaccine." About 80% of flu vaccines contain as much as 25 micrograms of mercury per dose. Since the EPA has set a limit of 0.1 mcg/kg (1 kg =2.2 lbs), Ayoub warns, everyone who receives the vaccine will be overdosed.

He explained that in 1999, "the Public Health Service (including the CDC and FDA), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and vaccine manufacturers agreed that thimerosal levels in vaccines should be reduced or eliminated."

However, he adds, "Contradicting its own policy, the CDC then increased mercury exposure to the fetus and infant by allowing the inoculation of pregnant women and young infants with the mercury-containing influenza vaccine."

On May 28, 2004, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice of the CDC released its annual report with recommendations for the prevention of influenza. The report included pregnant women amongst those who should receive the flu vaccine, even though the report noted only a minimal benefit from the vaccine in pregnant women:

"Researchers estimate that an average of 1-2 hospitalizations can be prevented for every 1,000 pregnant women vaccinated" (1, page 10)

In fact, for the 2003-04 flu season, the CDC reported "only 3 to 14% of those who got vaccinated were protected against the flu." It seems overly aggressive, Ayoub maintains, for the CDC to recommend that all pregnant women be vaccinated when, in fact, scientific data to date shows only marginal benefits and the only documented benefit seems to be fewer hospitalizations, not fewer morbidities or mortalities.

The benefit of influenza vaccination during pregnancy becomes even more questionable when considering the resulting risks to unborn infants. According to the ACIP, the safety of influenza vaccination is established by the following research:

One study of influenza vaccination of 2,000 pregnant women demonstrated no adverse fetal effects associated with influenza vaccine."

However, according to Ayoub, "In the April 12, 2002 MMWR, this same statement was followed by the caveat "additional data are needed to confirm the safety of vaccination during pregnancy." The comment was then dropped from the CDC's 2004 version of the report, but no new safety data was cited.

This solitary reference cited to establish influenza vaccine safety was co-authored by researchers at Boston University in 1973, but Ayoub advises that, "Upon closer inspection ... the study appears to have very little to do with influenza vaccine safety, but rather that of polio vaccination safety during pregnancy."

It is inexplicable, Ayoub says, that the ACIP would cite a paper in support of its conclusion of influenza vaccine safety while the Institute of Medicine rejected the same paper on the basis of the flawed analysis of polio vaccine safety.

Few doctors realize that most flu vaccines contain 25 micrograms of mercury per dose. Both the EPA and FDA's allowable daily exposure limits are 0.1 microgram per kg, meaning that recipients of a flu vaccine must weigh at least 550 pounds to meet federal exposure guidelines.

Therefore, by injecting the mother, the fetus would receive a dose of mercury that exceeds the federal limits by several hundred-fold. Furthermore, Ayoub adds, all federal guidelines are based upon studies of exposure tolerances in adults, not a fetus.

He questions why the CDC is so certain that ethylmercury can be safely injected into children or pregnant women, when the FDA and EPA have stated that ingestion of methylmercury can have harmful effects on the fetus, with warnings such as:

"some fish and shellfish contain higher levels of mercury that may harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system. . . . Therefore, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid some types of fish and eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury. . . While it is true that the primary danger from methylmercury in fish is to the developing nervous system of the unborn child, it is prudent for nursing mothers and young children not to eat these fish as well."

More recent studies have detailed the life-long damage of mercury to the brains of unborn children. For instance, on Feb 28, 2005, the Associated Press reported, "Lower IQ levels linked to mercury exposure in the womb costs the United States \$8.7 billion a year in lost earnings potential, according to a study released Monday by researchers at a New York hospital."

The Mount Sinai Center for Children's Health and the Environment combined a number of previous studies to determine hundreds of thousands of babies are born every year with lower IQ associated with mercury exposure, according to AP.

Lead researcher and pediatrician, Leonard Trasande, reports that annually, between 316,588 and 637,233 infants are born with umbilical cord blood mercury levels linked to IQ loss.

As an example, Trasande said each year, about 4% of babies are with blood mercury levels between 7.13 and 15 micrograms per liter. That level of mercury causes an IQ loss of 1.6 points, the researchers concluded.

A 1.6 point drop in IQ could cost a person more than \$31,000 in potential earnings over a lifetime, the study calculated, due to missed educational opportunities or jobs.

Manufacturers of the flu vaccine themselves, include package inserts that admit adequate studies have not been conducted on this vaccine. For example, the Fluzone insert stated:

"Animal reproduction studies have not been conducted with Influenza Virus Vaccine. It is not known whether Influenza Virus Vaccine can cause fetal harm when administered to a pregnant woman or can affect reproduction capacity."

Considering the rapid growth of autism, and other related neurodevelopmental disorders, and the number of reports documenting the causal relationship to mercury-based preservatives, Ayoub advises, "influenza vaccines should not be administered to pregnant women, and perhaps other high-risk groups, especially young children."

**Why Would FDA & CDC Approve Mercury-Based Vaccines?**

Ayoub believes that the CDC and FDA embrace marginal research and unsupported policies because of conflicts of interests. It may come as a surprise to most physicians, he explains, "that the CDC has a built-in conflict of interest with regards to its dual role in vaccine policy." One limb of the CDC that oversees vaccine safety has a budget of approximately \$30 million, while the limb that promotes vaccine usage (ACIP and NIP) has a \$1 billion budget, he says.

The CDC and FDA policy decisions are made through physician advisory panels whose members often have financial relationships with the very same pharmaceutical companies that they are supposed to regulate.

For example, during a congressional hearing on potential conflicts of interests at the FDA, it was revealed that 60% of the advisory members who voted to approve the poisonous rotavirus vaccine had financial ties to the drug companies manufacturing the vaccine. The committee also found that 50% of the CDC members were tied to the rotavirus makers.

However, according to Ayoub, the CDC and FDA do not have exclusive rights in coddling the industry. An investigation of doctors involved in co-authoring forty-four different Clinical Practice Guidelines for drug companies found:

85% of guideline authors have some sort of relationships with drug companies, and they are often not disclosed

38% of respondents said they had served as employees or consultants for drug companies; 58% received research money

59% had links with drug companies whose medications were considered in the particular guidelines they authored, almost all cases predating the guideline creation process

These numbers may be even greater, as only 52% of authors responded

"Most clinicians would be surprised by these revelations which challenge the blanket trust of a healthcare governance with uncomfortably close ties to the pharmaceutical industry," Ayoub says.

**Available Treatment For Autism**

When asked what treatments are available for autism, Ayoub said "The buzz these days is chelation," but there is no short answer to this. Suffice it to say, there are 2 ways to get mercury out of the body - one is pull it out directly by chelation agents."

The 2 top chelation people in the world are Gary Gordon, MD, and Rashid Butcher, MD, he adds.

Chelation agents such as DMPS and DTPA, are given orally, by IV, and recently with transdermal as a cream. According to Ayoub, the agents essentially bind free blood or loosely bound heavy metal agents, and eliminate them through stool and urine. They lower the total body burden and allow for natural redistribution from brain to blood for further removal. Ayoub claims side effects are uncommon, and the process is far safer than a vaccine.

The other method of removing mercury from the body is through a variety of biomedical therapies, all dietary or supplemental, "most of which act to jumpstart the body's own internal mercury detoxification pathways," Ayoub explains, but "the science here is very sophisticated," he added.

However, unfortunately, "many parents read about a diet or supplement, try one or two therapies on their own and fail," he says, and that "treatment is very dependent upon the experience of the health care provider, critically so," he advises.

**Why The Constant Denial?**

Ayoub was asked why government agencies and the pharmaceutical industry, are working so hard to keep the truth about the mercury-autism link hidden. He says it is a long story, but the main reason is because if they admitted guilt, it would mean the government agencies, drug companies and medical organizations, "have taken part in the largest iatrogenic epidemic known to man."

The fallout over admission of causality would be unprecedented, Ayoub adds. The lost confidence in American medicine would likely cause people to turn to alternative methods of medicine, and a rise in deeper investigation might reveal the truth about other suppressions related to cancer therapy, hypertension Rx, or Atherosclerosis.

Ayoub told Independent Media, "This is really the tip of the iceberg and I see a waterfall effect."

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(Evelyn Pringle is a columnist with Independent Media TV and an investigative journalist focused on exposing corruption in government)

Ayoub spoke at the AutismOne conference in Chicago in 2004, and will appear at the conference again in May, 2005. His CD-ROM titled, "Science and Politics of Vaccine-Induced Autism," contains resource materials and was distributed at the DANI conference in LA last fall. David M Ayoub MD, The Prairie Collaborative for Immunization Safety Email [Raypoke@mac.com](mailto:Raypoke@mac.com)

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