

DO VACCINES CAUSE AUTISM?

A letter I recently received from the mother of a patient got me thinking about vaccines and the debate over whether certain vaccines somehow play a role in causing autism. The vaccine-autism controversy offers many examples of how our current culture sometimes distorts the scientific approach to medicine in favor of untested holistic approaches. Many researchers, most notably from the University of Pittsburgh, have published an extensive number of articles emphasizing that autism may be traced to genetics not to vaccines. The findings may be found on the University's web page, <http://www.pittautismresearch.org/>

Here is an excerpt of the letter I have received from my patient's mother:

"Dear Dr. Ozdemir,

I want to apologize for letting my emotions get the best of me last week when we were discussing vaccines. You are the professional and I feel it is important for me to respect your knowledge and where you are coming from. I know you desire the best for your patients. Please accept my apology. My journey with autism has been arduous and very painful. Of course, there have been many rewards but not without a lot of hard work physically, emotionally and financially. I have made the greatest gains spiritually. Autism rules my day every second: what we do, what we eat and where we can go as a family. Thank you for treating my son's bronchitis and putting my mind at ease that he did not have RSV or H1N1. After following your recommendation, his bronchitis cleared up in a few days. I do not want you to think that I am just not vaccinating him (for now) without thought..."

A London researcher was the first to assert that the combination measles-mumps-rubella vaccine, known as MMR, causes autism in children. Following this "discovery," a handful of parents declared that a mercury-containing preservative in several vaccines was responsible for the disease. If mercury caused autism, they reasoned, eliminating it from a child's system should treat the disorder. Consequently, a number of untested, alternative therapies arose.

Children with autism have been placed on stringent diets, subjected to high temperature saunas, bathed in magnetic clay, asked to swallow digestive enzymes and activated charcoal, and injected with various combinations of vitamins, minerals, and acids. Instead of helping, these therapies can hurt those who are most vulnerable, and particularly in the case of autism. Some of the adverse outcomes of the alternative therapies are explained in Dr. Paul Offit's book "Autism's False Prophets," published in 2008.

It is important not to undermine childhood vaccination programs that have saved millions of lives. Prime examples of this are the documented success of the vaccines to treat H1N1 (the Swine Flu), polio, small pox and many other illnesses. My heart goes out to the mother who wrote me the touching letter. I acknowledge her pain and deeply sympathize with her since I too have a child with many special needs. But the truth of the matter is vaccines have proven to be highly effective in preventing a host of childhood illnesses such as polio, small pox, measles, mumps, rubella and many more and have not shown to cause autism. For example:

- Ten epidemiological studies have concluded the MMR vaccine doesn't cause autism;
- Six have shown Thimerosal doesn't cause autism; and
- Three have determined Thimerosal doesn't lead to subtle neurological problems.

Further references can be obtained from the University of Pittsburgh's web site and also from Dr. Paul Offit's book, "Autism's False Prophets."

A growing body of evidence now points to genes that are linked to autism, and despite the removal of Thimerosal from vaccines in 2001, the number of children with autism continues to rise. Should you have any questions, please feel free to [contact me](#).

My staff at Pediatric Associates of Jacksonville and I wish you a very happy, safe and healthy Holiday Season.

Dr. O