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Under Reported

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Trade-Off: Vaccine Maker Profits - Autism

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In 1997, Congress passed the FDA Modernization Act, which required the FDA to review all drugs that contained mercury and determine their adverse effects on humans. For many years, Thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative, was added to childhood vaccines in multi-dose bottles, basically to increase profits for vaccine makers.

It's important to know that Thimerosal is not a necessary component for vaccines. If they are packaged in single dose vials, the preservative is not needed. There is mounting evidence, that shows our government knew about the dangers of adding Thimerosal to vaccines. Research by WFAA-TV revealed that the FDA began asking questions about the dangers as far back as 1972. By 1992, the preservative had been removed from dog vaccines and contact lens solutions because of its risks. And yet the government refused to order its removal from childhood vaccines for 10 more years.

In 2000, the FDA determined that infants were receiving much more mercury than was considered safe under EPA guidelines. A twelve-to-fourteen month old child, receiving the mandated vaccines under the Immunization Schedule, often received four to six shots during one doctor visit. Consequently over time, the child would be injected with as much as 40 times the amount of mercury considered safe.

Twenty years ago, autism only affected one in 10,000 children. However, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, by January 2004, the incidence of autism rose to one in every 166 children. The Autism Autoimmunity Project reports that the disorder strikes 1 in 150 (or 1 in 68 families) today.

During the 1990s, some 40 million children were vaccinated and the number of Thimerosal containing vaccines given to children nearly tripled, and the financial rewards to drug companies as a result of the drastic increase were enormous. However, as the number of vaccines increased, autism rates inexplicably increased tenfold, according to the Spring issue of Mother Jones in 2004.

State by state statistics produced by the Department of Education, for the number of children aged 6-21 who have autism, compared the increase in cases over the 12-year period between 1992-93 and 2003-04, and the results were horrendous. In my home state of Ohio, in 1992-93 there were 22 cases of autism, in 2003-04 there were 5146 cases, or a 23,291% increase. In Illinois, there were

only 5 cases 12 years ago, while there were 6005 in 2003-04. Mississippi had no cases of autism 12 years ago, but had 622 in 2003-04. Wisconsin had 18 cases in 1992-93 and 3259 cases in 2003-04.

Eli Lilly introduced Thimerosal in the 1930s with very little safety testing. According to a congressional report, a 1935 Eli Lilly internal document noted that Thimerosal was considered unsatisfactory as a serum for use on dogs. The product has been on California's Proposition 65 list of known reproductive and developmental toxins for over a decade.

It's difficult to believe that anyone would by now even try to say there is no correlation between autism and the bombardment of mercury into the brains of children through their vaccinations in the 1990s.

Profits Over Safety

Autism is a source of devastation for the entire families. For some reason, it is 4 times more common in males than females, according to the Cure Autism Now Foundation. It involves a wide range of mild to severe symptoms, but each case seems to have 3 common symptoms: communication problems, impaired social relationships, and unusual patterns of behavior.

Autistic children develop unusual behaviors, such as twitching their fingers repeatedly, rocking, spinning, or rolling their eyes. A child may be progressing normally, but then begin to regress, losing speech, social skills and physical abilities.

Over the 1990s, parents and doctors began to notice that the onset of autism often followed the injection of vaccines with Thimerosal. At the turn of the century, Congress got involved in the debate. A House Government Reform Committee discovered a lack of research into the link between the increase in autism and childhood vaccines.

At that time, Republican committee chairman, Dan Burton of Indiana, noted that there were numerous conflicts of interest between federal research teams, policy-makers, regulators, health care agencies, and the vaccine makers who seemingly had the ability to influence decisions made by the FDA and CDC, regarding vaccines.

A four-month investigation by United Press International, determined that many members of the CDC's Vaccine Advisory Committee had obvious conflicts of interest with vaccine makers through relationships that included: sharing a vaccine patent; owning stock in a vaccine company; payments for research; getting money to monitor manufacturer vaccine tests; and funding academic departments. UPI also found that the CDC had 28 licensing agreements with drug companies, and one university, for vaccines or vaccine-related products, and had eight on-going projects to collaborate on new vaccines.

Burton's committee specifically zeroed in on the increasing numbers of vaccines children had been given over the past 15 years and the correlating rise in autism all over the country. During a hearing on June 20, 2002, Burton repeatedly asked FDA and CDC officials what they knew and when they knew it. And when their memories appeared lost, Burton produced agency memos to refresh them.

One 1999 internal FDA memo stated that the FDA had an "interim plan ... already in place for many years" to get rid of Thimerosal. Wording in the same memo revealed the FDA's fear that it will be accused of being "asleep at the switch for decades, by allowing a dangerous compound to remain in childhood vaccines."

In 2001, the CDC commissioned the Institute of Medicine to examine the Thimerosal-autism connection. The IOM's first analysis found the hypothesis "biologically plausible" and called for further research. But a reanalysis by the IOM in 2004 rejected any link.

According to nomercury.org's Lujene Clark, IOM committee meeting transcripts were leaked to outside parties and suggest that CDC officials pressured committee members to issue a finding

rejecting any link.

"The CDC contracted and paid for this series of reports from the IOM," says Clark. "They made it very clear that they wanted the IOM to give the nod, to say that 'We see no problems.' That's very, very frightening," according to Illinois Times on Feb 24, 2005.

Burton has even gone so far as to hint at bringing criminal charges if it turns out that government agencies were complicit with the drug companies in a cover-up. "Look, I don't think it makes any difference whether it's a private company or a government agency," Burton said. "If they know they're harming somebody and they continue to let it happen, then they should be held accountable.

There's no doubt that the drug companies knew of the dangers. The LA Times recently released a 1991 internal memo from the pharmaceutical company, Merck, that proves the company knew back then that the overuse of mercury in vaccines posed a dangerous health threat to children. The memo noted that 6-month-old children who received their shots on schedule would get a mercury dose up to 87 times higher than guidelines for the maximum daily consumption of mercury from fish.

In a 2003 committee report titled Mercury in Medicine, Burton concluded: "It should be crystal-clear by now that mercury is a toxic substance that does not belong in pediatric vaccines," based on expert testimony and research from leading universities.

Bush Could Issue An Executive Order

Prior to the election, the advocacy group, Unlocking Autism, asked President Bush to state his position on Thimerosal. On Feb 25, 2005, the group issued an open letter to Bush reminding him that he expressed full support for the removal of mercury from childhood vaccines in a written response from the Republican National Committee dated September 22, 2004. The group requested that Bush issue an Executive Order completely banning the use mercury for pregnant women and children under the age of 18.

The group maintains that Bush has a duty to communicate his position on the removal of mercury from vaccines to other Republicans in Congress now that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) has introduced Senate Bill 3, which would immunize drug companies from all liability for vaccine-related autism caused by mercury poisoning.

"The fact that President Bush stated before the election that mercury should be removed childhood vaccines means he believes thimerosal could, in fact, cause harm. If the President ... supports the removal of mercury from childhood vaccines, then surely he cannot support legislation that protects drug companies from accountability for the injuries caused by mercury," said Shelley Reynolds, President of Unlocking Autism.

SafeMinds is a leading autism advocacy organization fighting to ban mercury from all medicines and to promote treatment research for those who have already been injured.

On Feb 28, 2005, SafeMinds announced its opposition to the bill HR 650, "The Vaccine Accessibility for Children and Seniors Act of 2005." The group maintains that the title of the bill is deceptive in that it imposes barriers to legal remedies for the vaccine-injured.

According to Lyn Redwood, President of Safe Minds, "Each time legislation is introduced to protect the vaccine industry from product liability it is hidden behind a nice title or buried inside legislative minutia," she said "In 2002 legislators attempted a comparable end run on our civil rights by inserting similar language in the Homeland Security Bill, literally in the dark of night. Only when the American people spoke up in outrage was the move repealed.

"When faulty tires on SUVs were rampant, legislators didn't recommend that the tire or automotive manufacturers be protected from litigation," Redwood said, "it is beyond comprehension that when there are increased questions about vaccine injury that legislators would introduce legislation to take

away American's rights."

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