

GOT YOUR SHOTS? EXTRA

AN IMMUNIZATION UPDATE FROM THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DATE: March 6, 2008

TO: Immunization Providers

FROM: Kristen Ehresmann, M.P.H., RN
Manager, Immunization Program

RE: Vaccine injury case in Georgia

Please route to:

- Clinical supervisor
- Medical director
- Clinic manager
- Clinic staff
- Pharmacy
- Vaccine staff

You may be aware of media coverage of the settlement of a federal vaccine injury case finding that vaccination contributed to the worsening of symptoms of a disorder of a Georgia girl and may have contributed to the development of autism-like symptoms. The case puts a spotlight on the continuing public debate over whether vaccines have played some role in the increasing number of children with autism in the U.S. – particularly concerns about the preservative thimerosal.

Because this case could prompt some parents to refuse to vaccinate their children, we would like to offer you some talking points and resources to help respond to any questions your patients might ask about it.

- First, the settlement did not rule on any possible relationship between autism and thimerosal. It ruled that the five shots the girl received in July 2000, when she was 19 months old, “might exacerbate an existing encephalopathy in someone with a mitochondrial defect.”
- This is a legal settlement, not a scientific finding. Sixteen large, population-based studies do not support a relationship between vaccines and autism.
- Except for some flu shots, vaccines given to children no longer contain thimerosal as a preservative.
- There are two tragedies here. The tragedy of a family in pain, who will now -- thankfully -- receive financial relief. And the potential tragedy if parents who misunderstand this legal finding and don't vaccinate children, leaving them at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases. The risk of severe illness, complications, and death from these diseases is very real.

Resources:

- Transcript of today's CDC press conference with information on mitochondrial disorders:
www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media
- Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) immunization website:
www.health.state.mn.us/immunize (click on Vaccine Safety)
- MDH fact sheets:
 - Reliable Sources of Immunization Information
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/safety/imminfo.html>
 - Thimerosal and Childhood Vaccines: What You Should Know
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/hcp/thimerosalfs.html>
 - Thimerosal Content in Vaccines
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/safety/tcontent.pdf>

We will keep you informed as more resources become available.

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