

To Vaccinate or Not To Vaccinate...That Is the Question

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You want to protect your child, keep him safe, healthy and happy. It seems that around every corner there is some new threat to these tiny people entrusted in your care. Since their birth, you have heard from your healthcare providers about the importance of vaccines, read from pamphlets in the waiting room about which ones and why. But you have also heard from the media, from celebrities and even from other parents about concerns of dangers associated with these vaccines; the biggie on everyone's mind is the supposed association between the MMR (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella) vaccine and Autism. With so much conflicting and confusing information, it's hard to know what to believe. Let me help you.

The Autism-MMR health scare first started in the late 1990's, after Andrew Wakefield from the Royal Free medical school in London published a report that associated the onset of Autism like characteristics in 12 developmentally challenged children with the MMR vaccine. The fact of the matter is that this study was a hoax. Wakefield has been completely discredited and stripped of all medical titles, and the study itself was retracted in February 2010, 12 years after its publication. Sadly, by then it was already too late as the article had done its damage, not only to the cause of advocating the MMR vaccine, and other vaccines, but also to Autism research. As you read about the fraudulent report and its claims, bear in mind that this was not a simple misinterpretation of results. There were no mistakes made. The results were deliberately misreported to aid in the author's "conclusion" that there was a direct link between the MMR vaccine and onset of regressive autism (when a child appears to be developing normally, but later develops Autism). In science, results must be clear and reproducible; the Wakefield report was neither. It was a small case study series with no controls, and as such was criticized from the time of its release for lack of scientific validity and credible methods. Since the article, not a single scientific study has found a link between MMR vaccine and Autism. Furthermore, a recent article released in the BMJ (British Medical Journal) outlined the findings of an in-depth investigation of the Wakefield "study," highlighting everything from the bogus data to the reasons for the fraudulent report. As the BMJ reports, the undisclosed ultimate goal of the study was to gather information to sue a vaccine manufacturer. Guess who was on the lawyer's payroll? If you guessed Wakefield, you'd be right. Wakefield eventually earned £ 435,643 or

\$695,330 plus expenses for his “discovery” of “enteritis and disintegrative disorder” (what early regressive autism was called), even though such a syndrome had already been identified. Of the 12 children who supposedly had “regressive autism” following the MMR vaccine, only one child in fact had this form of autism and three didn’t have autism at all. Many of the children had had developmental concerns noted in their charts prior to receiving the vaccine, and certainly prior to what was reported in Wakefield’s article as the onset of developmental symptoms. Some of the children not only had recorded developmental delays but also facial dysmorphisms (when the face appears abnormal) noted prior to the MMR, although they were reported in the Wakefield case study as “previously normal.” One of the children had a heart defect called “coarctation of the aorta”, and, after corrective surgery, this child resumed appropriate and normal development. Many of the parents of the 12 children in Wakefield’s study had been recruited for the study by anti-vaccine groups, and all of the parents underwent a “questioning and counseling” prior to the initial examination of their children at Royal Free, potentially causing biased answers as a result of leading and suggestive questions. Furthermore, many of the parents also admitted to BMJ that the stories reported by Wakefield were vastly different than what they had reported to investigators during questioning; for example if the parent had said symptoms started at age 13 months, the report stated 15 months or 2 weeks after the MMR vaccine. With all this new information regarding the fraudulent Wakefield report, hopefully some of the damage done to the cause of advocating vaccination can be undone. In the past ten years literally millions of children have been studied in scientifically valid studies, none of which have shown any link between current vaccines and Autism.

The fact is that vaccines are medical miracles. Most people have never witnessed a major disease outbreak or seen the far reaching and devastating effects of disease processes such as Polio, Smallpox, or Mumps (yes, mumps can cause encephalitis, which is a brain infection that can lead to brain damage), because vaccines protect against these terrible diseases. Of course you want to protect your child. If you have questions or concerns about vaccines talk to your pediatrician or other health care provider, do the research, read everything you can from a reliable, unbiased source, and make your own decision. A series of articles in the next few months will describe in detail the diseases that vaccines protect against and the long term effects these diseases can cause.