
The Autism Mystery Continues as Researchers Cast Doubt on Vaccination Link

A new study as reported in the journal *Pediatrics* showed that the mercury containing preservative used in vaccinations, thimerosal, is rapidly excreted from infant bodies, and therefore cannot build up to toxic levels. It was previously believed that the ethyl mercury found in thimerosal behaved similarly to methyl mercury, which is found in fish. However, a research team out of the University of Rochester found this hypothesis to be surprisingly untrue ...

Led by Dr. Michael Pichichero, the team followed 216 infants from R. Gutierrez Children's Hospital in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 1999, the use of thimerosal in childhood vaccinations was discontinued in the U.S., but it is still routinely used in Buenos Aires.

The babies in the study were placed into three age groups, and their blood-mercury levels were tested before and after vaccinations were given as newborns, at their two-month check-up and at their six-month check-up.

Pichichero's team found that in all groups the half-life of ethyl mercury in the blood was just 3.7 days, significantly less than the half-life of methyl mercury, 44 days. The team lead also noted that the levels of thimerosal in the blood didn't go very high, and went down quickly. In fact, he stated that the levels were right back down to where they were at in the beginning by the time the next dose of vaccine was to be administered.

Dr. Pichichero's study appears to be in good company. The California Department of Health reported that rates of autism are continuing to climb, even though thimerosal was removed from childhood vaccines. Also, a large-scale U.S. Institute of Medicine review in 2004 failed to uncover a link between childhood vaccines and autism.

Nonetheless, vaccine critics, such as Barbara Loe Fisher, co-founder and president of the National Vaccine Information Center, still feel that vaccinations may have a link to autism, if not via thimerosal then perhaps another vaccine-related issue.

The full report on this study was scheduled for release on Monday in the February issue of *Pediatrics*, but the findings were released early by the American Academy of Pediatrics. They requested that ABC cancel the premiere episode of a new show that was scheduled to deal with the thimerosal-autism controversy.

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