

## **Thimerosal Update: The CDC's Scarlet Letter**

by Bobbie Manning  
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March is roaring in like a lion for the Center for Disease Control (CDC) as the controversy surrounding the autism thimerosal debate is capturing the attention of the media in a flurry of news stories:

On March 1, a new peer-reviewed study published by Association of American Physicians and Surgeons found autism rates declining following the removal from thimerosal (mercury) from childhood vaccines. The study was widely reported and was even picked up and reported by radio commentator icon, Paul Harvey, "the link between mercury & autism has been confirmed."

Also on March 1, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. jumped back into the thimerosal controversy with an article disclosing newly obtained letters written in 1999 between vaccine manufacturer SmithKline Beecham (SKB) and CDC Director Jeffrey Kaplan. In the documents SKB offers to supply mercury-free DtaP vaccines for the entire U.S. pediatric population through 2000. In response, Director Kaplan does not accept the manufacturers offer and states, the CDC will "continue to provide States with a choice among currently licensed brands of DtaP vaccine". Basically saying, thanks but no thanks.

Recognizing the failure of the CDC to make child safety a priority, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. joined with parent advocacy organization, A-CHAMP (Advocates for Children's Health affected by Mercury Poisoning) in calling for a senate hearing to investigate CDC's failure to remove mercury from vaccines when they had the opportunity and responsibility to do so. Kennedy's article, the documents and A-CHAMP joint press release are available at <http://www.a-champ.org/cdcmercuryremoval.html> In a press release, the National Autism Association (NAA) called for an investigation of the CDC's ability to access confidential data pertaining to children diagnosed with autism. Public perception of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is at odds with what is happening in a CDC study which apparently allows unfettered access to confidential school and medical records of autistic children. NAA reported, "A former employee of the Arkansas school district informed the child's family of the secret gathering of information after the fact, indicating that school personnel had been expressly forbidden to inform parents of the study, or that confidential records had been accessed and re-typed." For more information, go to [www.nationalautism.org](http://www.nationalautism.org)

The CDC's reputation took another hit with back-to-back articles challenging CDC credibility.

Following up on a series of stories on autism, reporter Jon Brodtkin, disclosed in a front page article that in the early 1990's, long before thimerosal was on anyone's radar, before parents were questioning thimerosal's safety, before there were any law suits filed, public health officials were already seeing reports of autism following vaccination in the government owned Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS).

In an article posted on the Huffington blog, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. took issue with the CDC's flu vaccination recommendation that would include children from 2 to 5 years old. Kennedy's article points out there are not enough mercury-free vaccines to cover the 17 million children that fall into this recommendation and that CDC is not asking companies to provide more mercury-free flu vaccines even though they have the ability to do so. Kennedy states, "Sanofi has said that the company was prepared to double production of thimerosal-free children's flu vaccine, but that there were no requests from CDC or the State Health Departments that it do so." The Kennedy article highlighted a reverse in policy to limit the amount of mercury given to infants and children.

All of these news reports come on the heels of an organized campaign by public health agencies aimed at stopping the legislative efforts to ban thimerosal at the state level. In Colorado, Maryland, Ohio and Washington opponents to the thimerosal legislation mounted aggressive campaigns to influence state legislators against the bills. Among those actively working to defeat the thimerosal bills are the States Department of Health, American Academy of Pediatrics, physician groups and CDC officials. Parents and concerned citizens have been critical of the fact that these same agencies advocated for the removal of thimerosal in 1999, but are now mounting a vigorous defense for its continued use. The Colorado Health Committee killed the legislation with a 6-1 vote. Maryland and Ohio are still pending. Washington's legislation just passed and it now awaits the Governor's signature.

In conjunction with the Defeat Autism Now! Conference, parents and activists will hold a rally/ protest on Capital Hill on Thursday, April 6th. Details for The Mercury Generation March are available at [www.themercurygenerationmarch.org](http://www.themercurygenerationmarch.org)