

## **Vaccines and Autism**

To: Vermont Health Care Providers

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### **- Please Distribute Widely -**

- The U.S. Court of Federal Claims and the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program recently ruled in favor of providing compensation to a now 9 y.o. Georgia girl whose parents reported symptoms consistent with acute encephalopathy following administration of multiple vaccines at 18 months of age. This child was subsequently diagnosed with a mitochondrial disorder and autism. This ruling has received much national and local media attention over the past several days. Despite some erroneous headlines to the contrary, **the government has *not* conceded that vaccines cause autism.**
- This legal case is based on clinical observations of one patient leading to a legal settlement – it is not based on scientific evidence. The federal government cannot comment on the specifics of the case, as it remains part of ongoing litigation. The American Academy of Pediatrics has requested access to official documents in the case so that medical experts can assist with answering questions from doctors and families.
- **Scientific studies have shown very clearly that vaccination is *not* associated with autism,** a conclusion that is in no way refuted by the ruling in this *legal* case. To date, 16 scientific studies have found no association. Ten (10) of these studies found no association between the MMR vaccine and autism, and six (6) found no association between thimerosal and autism. In May 2004, the Institute of Medicine released a report on vaccines and autism which found that neither thimerosal nor the MMR vaccines are associated with autism. The federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has also reviewed the scientific information concerning the allegation that vaccines cause autism and has found no credible evidence to support the claim.
- **Vaccines are safe and effective;** it would be extremely unfortunate if recent publicity caused parents to forego recommended childhood vaccinations, thus exposing children to the risk of harm or premature death from vaccine preventable diseases.
- As of 2001, all vaccines routinely recommended and supplied by VDH for children 18 years of age and under were produced without thimerosal as a preservative, with the exception of some inactivated influenza vaccine.

- Mitochondrial disorders are genetic in origin and not caused by environmental factors. Many infectious diseases, including those that vaccinations are meant to prevent, can act as stressors to children with mitochondrial disorder, worsening their neurological symptoms.
- Children and families affected by autism face serious and significant challenges. Recognizing the urgency and importance of helping to meet their needs, the Vermont Department of Health and partner agencies are working to assemble accurate information and develop a system of high quality services for patients and families. Federal agencies have also organized an interagency committee to expedite and coordinate research that will enable us to understand, treat and prevent autism and autism spectrum disorders.

For information related to this Advisory, please visit the Health Department's website: <http://healthvermont.gov/family/autism.aspx>, and <http://healthvermont.gov/hc/imm/provider.aspx>.

For questions about this Advisory, please call Dr. Wendy Davis or Dr. Donald Swartz at the Vermont Department of Health (802-863-7200), or call the Immunization Program (800-464-4343 or 802-863-7638).