

April 1, 2005

This message is to inform you of the release of a new book entitled "Evidence of Harm, Mercury in Vaccines and the Autism Epidemic: A Medical Controversy," authored by David Kirby, a journalist and freelance writer. The book is a "look back" at issues related to thimerosal and vaccines – and is primarily written from the perspective of people who believe there is an association between vaccines and autism. Mr. Kirby is on a media tour to promote the book, a schedule of which can be found at www.evidenceofharm.com. Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are an urgent public health issue, and affect the lives of too many families. Parents and families who have children affected by ASD are understandably interested in finding the causes of this lifelong disability. We appreciate the concern of parents of children with autism and their desire for information about its cause and treatment. We are dedicated to understanding better the biological, environmental, and gene-environmental causes of autism and other developmental disabilities. There is much that remains unknown about autism. However, we do know that early identification and intervention can help improve children's outcomes. CDC continues to support research related to autism, including studies designed to examine the possible causal association between autism and other possible environmental causes, including thimerosal-containing vaccines.

We at CDC are in the process of reviewing Mr. Kirby's book in detail, but the general issues raised in the book have already been extensively examined, including by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), in the past few years. As the IOM concluded in a recent report, the vast majority of studies, which have involved hundreds of thousands of children in a number of countries, have failed to find any association between exposure to thimerosal in vaccines and autism; that is, they have failed to find any evidence of harm.

CDC places a high priority on vaccine safety and the integrity and credibility of its vaccine safety research. We welcome attention and interest on vaccine safety. The public should expect safe vaccines, and the public is entitled to safe vaccines. CDC is committed to monitoring and ensuring vaccine safety. We carefully evaluate allegations of harmful vaccine effects and are prepared to adjust our policies if allegations prove scientifically valid.

Given the historical nature of the book, it is important to emphasize that today, with the exception of some influenza (flu) vaccines, none of the vaccines used in the U.S. to protect preschool children against 12 infectious diseases contain thimerosal as a preservative. Though some flu vaccines contain thimerosal as a preservative, preservative free, reduced thimerosal-content influenza vaccines are also available for use in infants, with the supply expected to increase significantly for the coming next season.

CDC and a number of agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have responded to concerns related to the use of thimerosal as a preservative in some of the recommended childhood vaccines. All supported, as a proactive and precautionary measure, efforts to remove, as quickly as possible, the use of thimerosal as

a preservative in childhood vaccines. CDC and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have funded studies to assess the health effects of thimerosal as well as assess whether there is an association between thimerosal and autism, learning or developmental disabilities, and other adverse health outcomes. Research in these areas is ongoing. CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have encouraged vaccine manufacturers in their efforts to remove thimerosal as a preservative as fast as possible, and FDA has facilitated the review and licensing of thimerosal preservative-free vaccines.

To assist you in addressing questions generated by the release of “Evidence of Harm”, we want to remind you of these resources and provide you with additional talking points:

Information about mercury and vaccines can be obtained at
<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vacsafe/concerns/thimerosal/default.htm#facts>.

Information about autism can be obtained at
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/aic/about/default.htm> (keep in mind that April is Autism Awareness Month!)

Talking points about the Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD) analysis published in the November 2003 issue of Pediatrics

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http://www.cdc.gov/nip/news/newsltrs/imwrks/2005/4-1-05_spec_imwks.htm