



## Autism Findings Retracted

Twelve years ago, the British medical journal *The Lancet* linked the measles-mumps-rubella vaccination to autism. Now the journal says that the study was compromised due to researcher Dr. Andrew Wakefield's reputed unethical and "callous disregard" for the children used in the study.

As a result, the journal has retracted its claims. But does this necessarily indicate that the results are wrong?

Ginger O'Conner from the Washington County Board of Developmental Disabilities warns, "Be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water." As an nationally recognized autism expert, O'Conner argues that since the results of Wakefield's study can no longer be considered "breakthrough," continued research is necessary.



The number of reported cases of autism has increased dramatically without explanation. The trend began in the 1980s and gained momentum in the 1990s. Speculation has prompted federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to commit to investigate the issue further.

While many medical experts have concluded that there is no link between autism and vaccines, most still caution on the use of thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative found in many vaccinations, including that for the swine flu. The federal Food and Drug Administration has recommended that thimerosal, used since the 1930s, be removed from vaccinations.

O'Connor is not convinced of the connection between the MMR vaccine and autism but believes that the possibility should not be dismissed. She claims, "What we know about autism, from most researchers, is that there is believed to be some sort of genetic component and then there's an environmental hit. And we don't know what that environmental hit is."

Some parents of autistic children say they do know. Lisa Rudley asserts that her child's autism was a direct result of his shots. "I watched my son descend into illness [after being vaccinated]. I think a mother's observation of her child is valuable." Her certainty has brought her to file a claim in "Vaccine Court," created by the federal court when parents first began filing suit for compensation for the bad reactions to vaccinations. This court was founded for the sole purpose of managing claims made as a result of vaccine injuries, most of which have been well documented.

Actress Holly Robinson Peete remembers, "When my son was two-and-a-half, he was just recovering from an ear infection and had been on antibiotics, therefore his immune system was suppressed. He had already missed several appointments for his vaccination so his pediatrician wanted to catch him up on all of them in the same day. Although I asked if he'd consider waiting or breaking up the cocktail, which contains three viruses, he laughed me out of the office and belittled me. I firmly believe that it



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 6, 2010

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took my son to a place of no return and his body could not handle it. He had a violent reaction with convulsions and then he stopped talking and slipped into a silence. He no longer said, 'Hi, Mommy,' he no longer responded to his name and he no longer made eye contact."

In recent months, television and radio commercials have targeted the autism epidemic. One in particular entails a mother leaving detailed information for her babysitter. "So here's my cell phone number, my husband's cell-phone number and here's the number to the grandparents, the number of the restaurant we'll be at. It's just down the block. And I told the neighbors you were here so if anything happens, anything at all, don't hesitate to call." At the end of the commercial, the narrator adds, "The odds of a baby sitter calling 911 1 in 1400. The odds of a child being diagnosed with autism 1 in 150." The narrator goes on to ask parents to be aware of the signs of autism, such as the child's inability to express jubilation, imitate facial expressions and sounds, and babble by 12 months of age.

The recent publicity has invoked public outcry for further autism research. Autism remains a relatively mysterious phenomenon and remains at the forefront of medical debates. Since the link between autism and vaccination has not been confirmed, O'Connor believes that children should continue to be vaccinated since the risks of not doing so are far greater. Lisa Rudley and Holly Robinson Peete may disagree.



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