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Contact: Jane Rohman, Publicist: (413) 848-1407; jrohman@earthlink.net

NYC-based author David Kirby is available immediately as an expert source:

(718) 230-4250; dkirby@nyc.rr.com

FLU VACCINATION SHORTAGE – IS THIMEROSAL TO BLAME?

If mercury is harmful and doesn't prevent all contamination, why are we still using it?

FDA once said that thimerosal was “no better than water” in stopping bacteria.

“People could die because thimerosal failed to do its job,” says author David Kirby.

NEW YORK - "While everyone is asking how the Chiron shut-down will affect vaccination rates in the U.S. this year, few reporters are asking why – and *how* – this could have happened," says David Kirby, author of the forthcoming book *Evidence of Harm – Mercury in Vaccines and the Autism Epidemic: A Medical Controversy*, from St. Martin's Press. Kirby is also a contributor to the health and science pages of *The New York Times* and other publications.

This week, Chiron's Fluvirin vaccine was pulled after an undetermined number of lots were found to be contaminated with the *serratia* bacteria, an extremely dangerous microorganism.

"Chiron used the mercury-based preservative thimerosal as a sterilizing agent in making its flu vaccine, Fluvirin, to prevent exactly this type of contamination," says Kirby, whose book explores the chilling possibility that thimerosal could have contributed to the rising numbers of cases of autism, ADD and other childhood disorders in America. "Thimerosal is also used as a preservative in multi-dose flu shot vials. By definition, no thimerosal-containing solution should have live bacteria present in its final formula."

Thimerosal, Kirby adds, "has never been proven to be 100% safe, and now we see again that it is not 100% effective either."

A law to ban thimerosal use in childhood vaccines was just signed by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Mostly, it affects the flu shot, in which infant children are exposed to 25 micrograms of mercury – or up to 18 times over the EPA limit.

Why is thimerosal used? Vaccine making is nasty business, and all kinds of microorganisms thrive in the warm egg-based brew used to produce the flu shot. The microbe-rich solution is eventually treated with thimerosal, as a sterilizing agent, in order to kill all the bugs. Most of the mercury is then removed at the end of production, though 25 micrograms-per-dose remain in each 10-dose vial, to avoid contamination from repeated puncture of the seal by syringes.

This particular vaccine was contaminated with *serratia* at some point in the production line at the company's factory in Liverpool, England. The question then becomes, with so much thimerosal in the mix, how is it possible that the bacteria was able to survive? The

answer is that thimerosal is a far from perfect preservative. In fact, an FDA panel back in 1982 reported that thimerosal only prevents the growth of *new* bacteria (i.e., it is bacteriostatic) rather than killing all the organisms altogether (or bacteriacidal). The panel called for removing all mercury-based preservatives from topical products, and said that thimerosal should be “not generally recognized as safe and effective.”

In fact, thimerosal was singled out as being “*no better than water* in protecting mice from fatal streptococcal infection.” And it was 35.3 times more toxic for embryonic chick heart tissue than for *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Other studies found that 8-to-26 percent of the population has a hypersensitivity to thimerosal. “The package insert on Chiron’s flu vaccine (www.chiron.com) states that: ‘Fluvirin should not be administered to anyone with a history of hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine, including eggs, egg products or *thimerosal*,’” Kirby notes.

“This is a terrible situation for the country, for public health and for faith in the immunization program,” Kirby adds. “It raises all sorts of troubling questions. If thimerosal doesn’t work, why are we using it? And since the FDA was going to let this vaccine into the country – why did it take the British Government to intervene on behalf of the health and safety of the American people? Is this why the Administration is opposed to importing potentially defective drugs made in foreign countries?”

And Kirby posed an even more disturbing question. What happened to the one million doses of Fluvirin that were already shipped to the United States this year? Were any of those doses contaminated, and are some people being injected with live *serratia* bacteria right now? Again, where was the FDA?

“Now we face an imminent flu season, at the last minute, with only half of the vaccine we will need this winter in the United States, and no time to make more,” says Kirby. “Millions will go unvaccinated and people could die because thimerosal failed to perform its job. If government and industry had worked long ago to develop a safe AND effective preservative and sterilizing agent, we would not be in this untenable, un-winnable position.”

A copy of the news release on *Evidence of Harm* is below.

CONTACT: Stephen Lee, St. Martin’s Press: 212-674-5151

NEW BOOK EXPLORES LINKS BETWEEN MERCURY IN VACCINES AND AUTISM, ADHD AND OTHER CHILDHOOD DISORDERS

NEW YORK – Did mercury in vaccines cause an epidemic of autism, ADD, ADHD, speech delay and other childhood disorders? A new book, to be released by St. Martin’s Press in Winter, 2005, explores this chilling possibility -- and the heated controversy swirling around it. The book, *Evidence of Harm, Mercury in Vaccines and*

the Autism Epidemic: A Medical Controversy, was written by *New York Times* contributor David Kirby.

By most accounts, autism is now epidemic in the United States. In the 1990's reported autism cases among American children began spiking, from about 1 in 10,000 children in 1987 to a shocking 1 in 166 today. In this period, new shots containing a mercury-based preservative called Thimerosal were added to the nation's already crowded vaccination schedule. Meanwhile, some parents noticed that their healthy children were descending into silent, disturbed, and physically ill behavior after receiving vaccinations. In 1999, the FDA announced that children were being exposed to mercury at very young ages at levels far exceeding federal regulations, but the public health establishment failed to take parental concerns about the impact seriously.

Evidence of Harm explores both sides of this controversy, which has pitted families and their allies against the federal government, public health agencies, medical academies, and powerful pharmaceutical giants. It examines:

- Story of Thimerosal: a mercury-based additive approved by the FDA in the 1930's as a vaccine preservative and never subsequently tested by the Agency
- Increase in reported autism cases and apparent parallel to the increase in number and frequency of Thimerosal-containing vaccinations in the 1990s.
- Private meeting at which FDA, CDC, medical and pharmaceutical company representatives discussed data on neurological childhood disorders related to mercury in vaccines
- Mysterious rider to the 2002 Homeland Security bill which would free drug companies of liability in lawsuits regarding Thimerosal
- State and federal lawsuits filed by families against the drug makers seeking compensation for the lifelong care of their ill children
- New biological research indicating a direct link between Thimerosal exposure and neurological disorders
- Preliminary Federal investigations currently underway into allegations of fraud, malfeasance, and conflict of interest at pharmaceutical companies and among officials at the FDA and CDC
- Recently discovered CDC data showing a shockingly high correlation between Thimerosal exposure and autism, ADD and other childhood disorders

This disturbing, important book examines both the personal stories of families and the unfolding political drama in the courts and halls of Congress.

DAVID KIRBY has been a contributor to *The New York Times* for seven years, where he writes science and health articles for Science Times, among other things, and has been a writer in this field for over fifteen years. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.