

For Immediate Release

Contact: Elizabeth Kilpatrick
(714) 625-5663
eksafeminds@gmail.com

ABC Drama, Eli Stone, Tackles Autism-Thimerosal Controversy SafeMinds asks network for balanced viewer information despite AAP pressure

Atlanta, GA -- January 29, 2007 – SafeMinds has formally asked ABC to resist the latest attempt by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to stifle public discussion on the link between thimerosal and autism. According to an article published in the New York Times last week, the premiere episode of *Eli Stone*, an ABC drama, depicts the main character, Eli Stone, successfully bringing a mother's lawsuit to court against a pharmaceutical company claiming that a vaccine additive, "mercuritol", in their influenza vaccine caused her son's autism. 'Mercuritol' resembles the real-life mercury-containing compound thimerosal, used in infant vaccines as a preservative.

A letter from AAP's president has urged ABC to cancel the program. Along with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), AAP's Committee on Infectious Diseases makes official recommendations on infant vaccines, and together they were responsible for the addition of mercury-containing vaccines to the infant immunization schedule, including influenza vaccines. Despite the availability of mercury-free flu vaccines, both AAP and CDC have refused to state a preference for them for infants and pregnant women. AAP's conflict of interest on thimerosal vaccines was not stated in their letter to ABC.

ABC has responded that they will air the episode and add a statement that the episode is fictional and to visit the CDC's website for more information on autism. SafeMinds, in its own letter to ABC, applauded their resolve to air the episode. In the interest of offering objective and balanced information on the real-life mercury-autism issue, SafeMinds has requested that ABC state that research on thimerosal's effects is on-going and that viewers be given the opportunity to visit the SafeMinds website as well as CDC's. The Safeminds website provides information on scientific research and analysis supporting a mercury-autism link and mercury-containing vaccines and their alternatives.

The episode airs on Thursday, January 31st at 10/9c and the parallels to real life drawn by the episode are undeniable. There are thousands of vaccine-autism cases yet to be heard in federal vaccine court. The autism epidemic is a national emergency, with 1 in 150 children diagnosed with some form of this debilitating disorder. The cost to society for specialized education and long term care is large. Mercury in any form is a potent neurotoxin and is especially harmful to the fetus and infants. Environmental mercury exposures are increasing. The rapid increase in autism rates indicates that one or more environmental factors are playing a role in autism. While research on the role of mercury in vaccines in relation to neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism continues, SafeMinds cannot support the use of mercury-containing vaccines. The *Eli Stone* premier is a needed addition to continued discourse on this important subject for our children's health.

The Coalition for SafeMinds (Sensible Action for Ending Mercury-Induced Neurological Disorders) is a nonprofit organization founded to investigate and raise awareness of the risks to infants and children of exposure to mercury from medical products, including thimerosal in vaccines.

Further information about SafeMinds and the harmful effects from mercury exposure may be found at www.safeminds.org.