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## **Vaccine Health Officials Manipulate Autism Records to Quell Rising Fears over Mercury in Vaccines**

### ***Safe Minds Cites Unscientific Trending Techniques and Conflicts of Interest, Call Study's Conclusions Doubtful***

Aspen CO, September 2, 2003 – A report published today by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in their journal *Pediatrics* clearly manipulates the incidence of autism in an attempt to clear thimerosal-containing vaccines of any role in the etiology of the disease, asserts parent advocacy group Safe Minds. “Our analysis of the research has uncovered so many questionable practices in the study that the authors’ conclusions clearing thimerosal are improbable”, says Sallie Bernard, Executive Director. Ms. Bernard also questions why *Pediatrics* failed to disclose significant conflicts of interest in publishing the study, violating standard editorial practice among medical journals.

Thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative found in a number of pediatric vaccines worldwide, has been linked to autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders by Safe Minds, independent scientists, Congress, and parents of disabled children. The *Pediatrics* study, “Thimerosal and the Occurrence of Autism? Negative Ecological Evidence From Danish Population-Based Data,” claims to refute such a link by utilizing Danish psychiatric records to find cases of autism. The study’s premise is based entirely on a purported increase in autism incidence in Denmark throughout the 1990s, despite removal of thimerosal in 1992. However the increase is not real but falsely created by the author’s use of techniques which artificially boosted the number of cases identified.

Initially the authors identified autism cases solely from hospitalization records, but in 1995 they added in outpatient cases to the database. Since outpatient cases outnumbered in-patient case by 13.5 to 1 and represented 93% of all autism cases, an appearance of an increase was created. The authors also added cases from a large clinic in Copenhagen starting in 1992 which accounted for 20% of the caseload. Previously, records from this center were excluded.

Another concern is that in 1994 the Danish psychiatric system changed its classification scheme and began to diagnose autistic patients under the “infantile autism” criteria rather than the old “psychosis proto-infantilis,” a category that has never been used in published autism surveys outside of Denmark. In an earlier research paper on the same patient population, one of the Danish investigators stated that the old category would have excluded a proportion of autistic children, relative to the new criteria.

“The epidemiology of this study appears to be a clumsy attempt to provide support for policy choices in which the authors and their collaborators are involved” said Lyn Redwood, President of Safe Minds. “The authors could have easily adjusted their trend data to accommodate these obvious changes to their patient population”. It was also discovered that two of the authors of the study work for the Danish manufacturer of thimerosal vaccines. This conflict of interest was not disclosed by *Pediatrics* and the journal itself receives significant advertising revenues from vaccine manufacturers.

Safe Minds notes that AAP spearheaded the drive in 1999 to eliminate thimerosal from childhood vaccines in the U.S., a controversial move opposed by others at the time. This courageous position has been replaced by a new organizational stance defending the safety of thimerosal-containing vaccines when independent research supporting such safety is lacking. Safe Minds regrets this change in the AAP’s position and encourages *Pediatrics* to raise its scientific standards in what it chooses to publish.

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