



For Immediate Release

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**SafeMinds Statement on Autism and Vaccines in
the United States Presidential Campaign Dialogue**

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SafeMinds is delighted that several candidates for president of the United States have been speaking out on national television about the epidemic of autism in our country, as well as the choice that some parents and medical professionals are making to slow down and spread out the administration of childhood vaccines. Autism prevalence rates have skyrocketed since the 1980s. Prior to that decade, autism was reported to affect 1 in 2,000 children¹. Now, the data show that 1 in 68 children has been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).²

The autism epidemic continues to escalate unchecked as indicated by the latest California prevalence numbers³, and it must receive the priority it deserves so that we can better protect children born today. A new study from the University of California-Davis estimates that autism will cost the United States \$268 million in 2015, and this number is projected to increase to \$1 trillion by 2025 if prevalence trends continue⁴. This is far more than Alzheimer's is expected to cost⁵.

While autism is not new, the explosion of environmentally-induced brain disorders is unprecedented. Independent scientists have confirmed what classroom teachers and parents already know—the increase in autism is not just a question of better diagnosis or more awareness. Rather, it is also the result of something environmental, or perhaps

¹ http://archive.hhs.gov/nvpo/factsheets/fs_tableVII_doc2.htm

² <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>. The current autism prevalence rate is already out of date because it takes the CDC eight years to analyze the rate of autism in any one age group of kids. So, the latest statistic only applies to American children born in the early 2000s.

³ http://www.sfautismsociety.org/uploads/1/1/7/4/11747519/autism_rising_2015.pdf

⁴ <http://ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/publish/news/newsroom/10214>

⁵ <http://www.alzheimersreadingroom.com/2015/02/cost-of-alzheimers-could-soar.html>

several environmental factors, causing harm to children’s brains.⁶ Autism is one of the major crises of our time.

“I continue to diagnose infants and toddlers with autism at an increasingly-alarming rate in my medical practice. This is, without exception, the most common serious pediatric disorder today,” said Bob Sears, M.D., a pediatrician in private practice in southern California. Dr. Sears is a graduate of Georgetown University School of Medicine, science advisor to SafeMinds, and founder of the Immunity Education Group. “After 15 years of CDC research, we have not yet been able to slow this epidemic. The families affected by autism need support, answers, and solutions.”

The early childhood vaccine schedule has dramatically expanded in America since the 1980s.⁷ We now give children 70 vaccine doses, which is a dramatic increase from the 24 doses given in the early 1980s; 30 of these doses are given by age one. Yet there has never been a controlled, scientific study comparing the health outcomes of children who receive the current vaccine schedule in its entirety to children who are not vaccinated. Studies that objectively examine questions about vaccine safety are routinely blocked from publication and withdrawn from scientific journals. The Institute of Medicine stated in a 2013 report that “studies designed to examine the long-term effects of the cumulative number of vaccines ... have not been conducted,” and recognized that “existing research has not been designed to test the entire immunization schedule.”

The medical community overwhelmingly supports vaccines as an effective preventative medical intervention that help protect children and adults against infectious disease. At the same time, some research demonstrates concerns regarding vaccines. The Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, a federal program that compensates victims of vaccine injury, has paid out over \$3 billion since 1988 to people who have been injured or killed by vaccines, and has compensated at least 83 cases of brain injuries **involving autism or autism-related features**.^{8 9} The American vaccine schedule has been linked to higher incidences of infant mortality¹⁰, and aluminum-induced neurotoxicity¹¹. Vaccinating low-birth-weight babies has been found to lead to breathing difficulties, seizures, and death¹².

“I give vaccines in my office every day, and I consider it my ethical duty to fully inform my patients about the benefits of vaccination as well as the risks,” Dr. Sears said. “Informed consent without coercion is essential to the practice of medicine, and parents should

⁶ <http://www.ehjournal.net/content/pdf/1476-069X-13-73.pdf>

⁷ In 1980, the early childhood vaccine schedule only included DTP, Polio, and MMR. It now includes DTaP, Polio, MMR, Hep B, Hib, chickenpox, Hep A (in some states), rotavirus, pneumococcal, and yearly influenza vaccines—along with human papilloma virus, and Meningococcal A/C and B vaccines for adolescents.

⁸ <http://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation/data.html>

⁹ <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/pelr/vol28/iss2/6/>

¹⁰ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3170075/>

¹¹ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23609067>

¹² <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2300376>

always maintain authority over medical decisions for their children without feeling pressure or discrimination.”

SafeMinds supports a national vaccine safety agency. We are also dismayed by the caustic tone and unproductive rhetoric this issue has generated. To raise concerns about the current immunization program does not make one anti-vaccine. All parents, researchers, and elected officials want the best medical care and healthiest outcomes for American children. Addressing the concerns raised about vaccine safety, rather than ridiculing or dismissing them out of hand, may actually increase vaccine acceptance rates, and would certainly reduce the divide between those who believe vaccines should be universally-administered and those who choose not to vaccinate according to the current schedule.

The United States’ childhood vaccine schedule is given to approximately four million children a year. Vaccines are one of the few medical products given to someone who is healthy to prevent disease; most medical products are given to treat a disease or condition that already exists. As such, vaccines must be the safest products on the market. With an escalating vaccine program, more thorough and objective research is needed so that parents can continue to make the safest vaccination choices for their children in consultation with their family physicians.

We call on every candidate for president to be publicly committed to helping meet the needs of children and adults living with autism and their families, as well as to protecting babies’ brains, identifying the causes of autism, and stopping this environmentally-induced epidemic.

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About SafeMinds:

SafeMinds was founded in 2000 by a handful of parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Its mission is to end the autism epidemic by promoting environmental research and effective treatments. SafeMinds is focused on resolving the autism epidemic. We work to prevent new cases and improve the lives of those who have autism today. For more information, visit www.safeminds.org.