The Safety of Vaccines for African American Children

Immunization is one of the greatest health achievements in recent history. As public health advocates, we have witnessed firsthand the value of vaccination in protecting our children from dangerous, and potentially deadly, diseases. As outbreaks of these diseases begin to spread again across the country, we feel it is necessary to remind parents of the importance of ensuring the timely immunization of children of all races, ethnicities and genders in order to protect them from deadly infectious diseases.

Recently, members of the African American community have become concerned that certain vaccines may not be safe for their children or that they may cause autism. This is simply not true. The worldwide scientific community has conducted multiple studies and reviews demonstrating that neither vaccines, nor components of vaccines, are linked to autism. Many of these published scientific studies are listed below.

Vaccines are only licensed for use if safety and effectiveness are established through extensive clinical trials. Following licensure by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), vaccines are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices after additional, intense scrutiny of the safety, effectiveness and optimal timing of vaccinations. Further, once a vaccine is in use, several comprehensive systems are in place to continue to monitor the safety and effectiveness of each vaccine. These include the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), which accepts reports from any provider, patient, parent, or other person who is aware of any problem after vaccination. There are no indications that African American children are at a higher risk of rare side effects from vaccines than any other ethnic group.

Furthermore, African American children are no more likely to develop autism than White, Asian or Hispanic children. However, they are less likely to receive a timely diagnosis of autism. In addition, while there has yet to be an identified cause or cure for autism, vaccines have been evaluated extensively and the evidence shows that vaccines do not play a role in the condition.

In recent years, we have seen a resurgence of incidences of diseases here in the United States. Two examples are measles and whooping cough. In 2014, 667 cases of measles were reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This included one large outbreak of 383 cases in an unvaccinated Amish population. Additionally, in late 2014, a measles epidemic began at Disneyland and rapidly spread throughout the U.S. and neighboring countries as exposed park goers returned to their homes, carrying the measles virus with them. As a result of this large multi-state outbreak and a few others, 189 cases of measles were reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2015.

Outbreaks of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, have also plagued our country in recent years. In 2013 and 2014, nearly 57,299 cases were reported, and more than 18,000 cases were confirmed in 2015. Sadly, this disease, which is particularly deadly to infants, is often spread amongst family members who are unaware that their coughs are in fact whooping cough. Recent outbreaks of several other vaccine-
preventable diseases including meningitis, mumps and influenza continue to cause serious illness and even death among people of all ages in the United States.

These latest outbreaks provide yet another reminder of the importance of timely vaccinations. We urge all parents to talk to their children’s health care provider if they have concerns about vaccines so that they can make informed decisions about the vaccinations recommended for all children, pre-teens and teens. Working together, we can remove barriers to vaccination and eliminate disparities among children of all races and ethnicities.

Signed by:

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Published Scientific Research on Safety of Vaccines:

**Autism Occurrence by MMR Vaccine Status Among US Children With Older Siblings With and Without Autism**
JAMA, Jain, et al. (April 21, 2015)

**Association Between Vaccine Refusal and Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in the United States: A Review of Measles and Pertussis**
JAMA, Phadke, et al. (March 15, 2016)

**Safety of Vaccines Used for Routine Immunization in the United States**
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. (July 2014)

**Safety of Vaccines Used for routine Immunization of US Children: A Systematic Review**
Pediatrics, Maglione et al. (July 1, 2014)

**Prenatal and Infant Exposure to Thimerosal From Vaccines and Immunoglobulins and Risk of Autism**
Pediatrics, Cristofer S. Price, ScM, William W. Thompson, PhD et al. (September 13, 2010)

**Neuropsychological Performance 10 Years After Immunization in Infancy With Thimerosal-Containing Vaccines**
Pediatrics, Alberto Eugenio (February 2009)

**Lack of Association Between Measles Virus Vaccine and Autism with Enteropathy: A Case-Control Study**
PLoS One, M Hornig (September 2008)

**Measles Vaccination and Antibody Response in Autism Spectrum Disorders**
Archives of Disease in Childhood, Gillian Baird, F.R.C.Paed. (February 2008)
Continuing Increases in Autism Reported to California's Developmental Services System
*Archives of General Psychiatry*, Robert Schechter, MD, MSc and Judith K. Grether, PhD (January 2008)

Early Thimerosal Exposure and Neuropsychological Outcomes at 7 to 10 Years

Lack of Association Between Rh Status, Rh Immune Globulin in Pregnancy and Autism
*American Journal of Medical Genetics*, Judith H. Miles and T. Nicole Takahashi (May 2007)

Pervasive Developmental Disorders in Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Prevalence and Links With Immunizations
*Pediatrics*, Eric Fombonne, MD (Volume 118, Number 1, July 2006)

Comparison of Blood and Brain Mercury Levels in Infant Monkeys Exposed to Methylmercury or Vaccines Containing Thimerosal
*Environmental Health Perspectives*, Thomas M. Burbacher, PhD (April 2005)

MMR Vaccination and Pervasive Developmental Disorders: A Case-Control Study
*The Lancet*, Liam Smeeth, MRCGP (September 11, 2004)

Thimerosal Exposure in Infants and Developmental Disorders: A Prospective Cohort Study in the United Kingdom Does Not Support a Causal Association
*Pediatrics*, John Heron and Nick Andrews, PhD and Jean Golding, DSc (September 2004)

Neurotoxic Effects of Postnatal Thimerosal are Mouse Strain Dependent
*Molecular Psychiatry*, M Hornig, MD (June 2004)

Safety of Thimerosal-Containing Vaccines: A Two-Phased Study of Computerized Health Maintenance Organization Database
*Pediatrics*, Thomas Verstraeten, MD (November 2003)

Association Between Thimerosal-Containing Vaccine and Autism
*Journal of the American Medical Association*, Anders Hviid, MSc (October 2003)

Thimerosal and the Occurrence of Autism: Negative Ecological Evidence from Danish Population-Based Data
*Pediatrics*, Kresten M. Madsen, MD (September 2003)

Autism and Thimerosal-Containing Vaccines: Lack of Consistent Evidence for an Association

Association of Autistic Spectrum Disorder and the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella Vaccine
*Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, Kumanan Wilson, MD, MSc, FRCP (July 2003)

Evidence of Brain Overgrowth in the First Year of Life in Autism
*Journal of American Medical Association*, Eric Courchesne, Ph.D. (July 2003)
Thimerosal and Autism?
*Pediatrics*, Karen Nelson, MD (March 2003)

**Neurologic Disorders After Measles-Mumps-Rubella Vaccination**
*Pediatrics*, Annamari Makela, MD (Volume 110, Number 5, November 2002)

**Mercury Concentrations and Metabolism in Infants Receiving Vaccines Containing Thiomersal: A Descriptive Study**
*The Lancet*, Michael Pichichero, MD (November 2002)

**No Evidence for a New Variant of Measles-Mumps-Rubella-Induced Autism**
*Pediatrics*, Eric Fombonne, FRCPsych (Volume 108, Number 4, October 2001)