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New study claims 83 autism cases caused by vaccinations

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By Nicole Pollard, ksl.com Contributor

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Researchers released the most recent news in the autism-vaccine debate at a press conference in Washington, D.C., earlier this month.

A study scheduled for publication in the *Pace Environmental Law Review* closely examined public information on 1,300 cases in which the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program compensated families. Significant brain injuries were found in compensated patients as a direct result of vaccinations. Eighty-three cases specifically resulted in autism and are being called, "the tip of the iceberg."

Parents of vaccine-injured children were present at the press conference along with representatives from the Elizabeth Birt Center for Autism Law and Advocacy. All participants demanded that Congress acknowledge the findings and explain why the NVICP awarded damages for these cases while the government continues to promote the safety of childhood vaccinations.

"The influence of vaccines on a child cannot explain the measurable differences in brain structure and brain function that exist between autistic and non-autistic children."
-American Academy of Pediatrics

The study, "Unanswered Questions From the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program: A Review of Compensated Cases of Vaccine-Induced Brain Injury," has the autism community talking and eager for congressional hearings to address allegations the government has quietly swept many of these cases under the rug to avoid public scrutiny. The study calls the situation nothing short of a cover-up.

Though it cannot be said that the findings scientifically prove a direct correlation between autism and vaccinations, many believe it is a step toward validating what so many in the autism community have said is at the root of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The full effect this study has on the autism-vaccine debate is yet to be seen.

This announcement may seem like a major setback for the medical community. There have been declines in immunizations at times because of the barrage of information about autism via the Internet and outspoken celebrities, but it is not the first time a major study has pointed to vaccines as a trigger for autism. In February 1998, a well-publicized study conducted in England claimed that the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccination was linked to Autism Spectrum Disorder. The lead author of the original study, Dr. Andrew Wakefield, was later discredited and said to have been accepting money from a lawyer suing a vaccine manufacturer. Additionally, the manner he conducted his research in was found to be unethical, unreliable and impossible to duplicate,

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according to the UK General Medical Council. Ten of the 13 authors of the study later retracted their claim, but the media frenzy had already begun and many parents have held on tightly to the notion that vaccinations are to blame for this epidemic.

Stan Kurtz became a strong advocate and respected figure in the autism community after his son, Ethan, was diagnosed with autism. In response to the autism-vaccine link and recent findings Kurtz said, "You don't hear stories from parents saying, 'One week before my child had their vaccines, they ended up with autism.' What you do hear is, 'I took my child to the doctor, they got vaccinated and they weren't the same shortly after that.'"

The majority of the medical community and the American Academy of Pediatrics have repeatedly played down the idea that autism is a direct result of immunizations or the components therein. The Immunization Action Coalition has said, "Scientific evidence is 'overwhelmingly contrary' to the theory that autism is linked to MMR vaccine, thimerosal, or a combination of the two." In addition it believes, "The influence of vaccines on a child cannot explain the measurable differences in brain structure and brain function that exist between autistic and non-autistic children." But many parents are not convinced. Parents of autistic children, who have noticed a significant regression and developmental changes shortly after vaccinations, want answers.

The autism community is divided on this topic: 50 percent of parents with autistic children blame vaccinations, while the other half believe other genetic and environmental factors were at play. Mique Provost said of her oldest son's autism, "I feel that autism is from a number of things, not from one specific cause. I also think every case is different. In our case, I feel that my son had genetic markers and that the vaccines stressed his little body further, resulting in autism."

Those who are anti-vaccine argue that many children have atypical or underdeveloped immune systems too weak to handle the stress of multiple vaccinations and autism is the result of this overload. But the AAP disagrees saying, "There is no scientific reason for or benefit to separating the vaccines. By separating them, we are putting children (and pregnant women who may be exposed to them) at increased risk by extending the amount of time they go unvaccinated." Those who support vaccinations emphasize that an infant's immune system is exposed to thousands of germs simply by breathing. Dr. Ari Brown, author and contributor to the IAC explained, "Even if your child got 11 shots at the same time, he would need to use only about 0.1% of his immune system to respond to the vaccines."

***"You don't hear stories from parents saying, 'One week before my child had their vaccines, they ended up with autism.' What you do hear is, 'I took my child to the doctor, they got vaccinated and they weren't the same shortly after that.'"* -Stan Kurtz**

With a cure for autism yet to be found, Shalayna Tyre of Arizona believes her son and other autistic children will benefit from more public awareness and education. "I just wish people would take the time to understand these children a little more. I would also love for kids to have more of an understanding of children with Autism. Children with disabilities are so often the targets of bullying. It breaks my heart and I wish they were taught to be more compassionate and understanding."

When asked what she would like people to know about her son and autism, Provost said, "Although there is a lot of talk about autism, there are really people behind those numbers. It is a daily struggle for my son and for our family. Just like everyone else, some days are better than others. But would I give anything to have a typical conversation with him? Yes! A million times over. We take it one day at a time in our house. Ideally I would love for him to have some independence. More than anything I want him (and my other two) to be happy."

Speculation about the safety of vaccinations will most likely continue to be a hot topic until all the pieces of the autism puzzle are solved.

The complete study and video of Tuesday's press conference can both be found at www.ageofautism.com.

Nicole Pollard resides in Canyon Country, CA.

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