



A Message About Vaccines

There has been a ton of press over the past few years regarding concerns over the safety of vaccines. Do various vaccines contain toxic levels of heavy metals such as mercury and aluminum? Is there any kind of link, causal or not, between vaccines and developmental disorders such as autism?

This topic has become big business with several celebrities speaking out against childhood vaccination. A number of books have been written and promoted over the past few years suggesting “alternative” vaccination schedules that either “separate out” vaccines, otherwise combined together, stagger the administration of vaccines over time, or actually eliminate the administration of “non-essential” vaccines altogether.

Each disease that is preventable with vaccines is still present in populations worldwide, and has the potential to cause death or serious morbidity in our children. Without going into too much detail, there are a couple of messages I would like to convey. Over the past few decades, dozens of studies, both prospective and retrospective, have been done in the United States and throughout the world looking for associations between vaccines and developmental disorders.

No associations have been found. (A study a few years ago out of Poland actually found a *lower* rate of autism in a group of children who received the MMR vaccine when compared to a group who did not receive the vaccine.) It is not as if there are many studies that show vaccines are safe and only a few that raise questions. *No reputable scientific study has ever demonstrated any link between vaccines and developmental problems.* Not one.

“Alternative” vaccine schedules have not been studied or substantiated to be in any way safer or even to be as effective as the recommended standard schedule. By changing the order or timing of the vaccines, one is using the vaccines “off label” in a manner that has not actually been tested. Physicians use medications “off label” from time to time. For example a physician may use an antibiotic for an infection that the drug has not been approved for or use a medication on an age group that has not been tested. When going “off label”, the doctor is presuming that the drug will work as intended, without any additional risks or side effects. There is usually a reason for doing so. (i.e. Other medications had been tried unsuccessfully.) Is this really what parents want to do with their babies?...Experiment with their health by using vaccines “off label?”

As you probably are aware, California is currently experiencing the biggest epidemic of whooping cough in almost 60 years. The geographic area with the highest rate of this devastating disease is Marin County. Is it any coincidence that this area also has the lowest rate of vaccination? There is a direct correlation between vaccination rates and disease prevention.

Furthermore, the recent outbreak of measles centered around Disneyland has demonstrated that leaving your child susceptible to preventable diseases not only puts them at risk for contracting these illnesses but then makes them then the vector of transmission to many others.

When looking for advice on areas of importance to us, we turn to the experts that have earned our trust. When looking for investment advice, for example, we don't consult the person behind the make-up counter at a department store, we ask a financial planner with training and experience. Why would we seek out the advice of any less of an expert on issues regarding our most precious investment—our children?

I am not suggesting that vaccines have zero risk. Everything in life has some risk. There could be an allergic reaction to a component of the vaccine or the baby could get a fever or be fussy for a day or two. The risks with vaccines are known, and are very, very small. The diseases that are prevented by vaccines, in most instances, have the potential for great harm. Educated parents want to insure the health and safety of their children. It is understandable that questions arise over vaccines, their safety, and whether or not they are necessary. When you have questions like these, don't you agree that the resource for those answers is the person you have entrusted to care for your child? **Seek answers from professionals that you know and trust**, not celebrities on talk shows, and certainly not websites that make statements without data and proof to substantiate them.

Be Well.

--Drew Nash, M.D.