



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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