

# Vaccine Refusal Triggered 2005 Measles Outbreak

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The largest documented measles outbreak to hit the United States in a decade infected 34 people in Indiana last year, most of whom were children whose parents had objected to immunization.

The outbreak "shows that states, localities, and health care organizations need to implement more effective policies to pro-

tect persons traveling abroad, home-schooled children, and health care workers against measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases," wrote Amy A. Parker of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, and her associates. The CDC team found that all but two of 34 infections were in people who had never been vaccinated for measles; 30 of the patients (88%) were aged 19 years or younger.

"Concern about adverse events, particularly related to media reports of a puta-

tive association between vaccinations and autism and of the dangers of thimerosal, appeared to play a major role in the decision of these families to decline vaccination," the investigators found.

The index patient was an unvaccinated, 17-year-old girl who was infected during a church-mission trip to a Romania orphanage. Despite having prodromal symptoms, she attended a large gathering of church members the day after she got home. Eighteen patients were infected at the meeting

(N. Engl. J. Med. 2006;355:447-55).

A school survey in 2004-2005 indicated that 98% of kindergartners and 98% of sixth graders in Indiana had received the recommended two doses of measles vaccine. But church officials estimated that a much smaller percentage of the 500 people who attended the Indiana meeting had been immunized, perhaps 90% or less.

"As long as some groups within a given community respond to spurious claims about the risks of the vaccine by refusing to vaccinate their infants, further outbreaks will occur," commented Dr. E. Kim Mulholland of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in a perspective that ran with the article (N. Engl. J. Med. 2006;355:440-3). ■

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## Immunizations Scant in Siblings Of Autistic Kids

SAN FRANCISCO — Less than half of the younger siblings of children with autism are fully immunized, according to a small study presented by Pamela E. Green in a poster session at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies.

The study involved 34 children who were part of a prospective study of siblings of children with autism spectrum disorders. The younger children were 3 years old when Ms. Green of Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre, Toronto, and her colleagues documented their immunization status. The older siblings with autism had a median age of 50 months (4.2 years) at that time. Data were available for 29 of the older siblings with autism spectrum disorders, and all were fully immunized.

Only 14 (41%) of the younger siblings were fully immunized. Another 5 (15%) were partially immunized, 6 (18%) had delayed immunization, and 9 (26%) had no immunizations at all.

The investigators considered a child fully immunized if there was documentation of three doses of pentavalent vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b) plus a booster along with one dose of MMR. They were considered partially immunized if there were missing doses of pentavalent vaccine and/or MMR, and they were classified as delayed immunization if the MMR was not administered until 17-36 months.

The parents were questioned about what sources of information influenced their decision about immunization. Half of them said that the pediatrician was the major influence, 10% cited the Internet, 10% cited a general practitioner, and 30% cited other influences, including the media, friends, fear of autism, and their own research.

The meeting was sponsored by the American Pediatric Society, Society for Pediatric Research, Ambulatory Pediatric Association, and American Academy of Pediatrics.

—Robert Finn