



NATIONAL INFLUENZA VACCINE SUMMIT NEWSLETTER

Influenza Activity Spotlights

Thursday, January 29, 2008

Issue #14

Professional Medical Organizations

Please disseminate widely to all of your members.

This update is to provide the latest information on influenza to partners of the National Influenza Vaccine Summit. Endorsement of any material present herein by either the CDC or the AMA, co-sponsors of the Summit, should not be inferred.

1. There has been a lot of coverage recently regarding the premiere episode of ABC's "Eli Stone." In this episode, the mother of a child with autism wins a judgment against the manufacturer of "mercuritol," which is in the influenza vaccine. Many large national organizations have written to ABC expressing their concern that this episode perpetuates the myth that vaccines can cause autism. The March of Dimes released a [statement](#) supported by 7 previous directors of the CDC. Please feel free to contact ABC on this issue; you may view [contact information](#) for ABC Studio/Disney executives as well as some of the letters that have been sent (e.g., from the [Immunization Action Coalition](#), the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [Wyeth Vaccines](#), and the [AMA](#)).

Media Coverage:

1) "[Pediatricians Group Wants Show Canceled](#)" *Associated Press* (Also ran on *Forbes*, *Business Week*, *CNNMoney*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Seattle Times*, *St. Louis Dispatch*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Miami Herald*, *Denver Post* and numerous other publications, television and radio news channels) (January 28, 2008) - "The nation's largest pediatricians' group on Monday said ABC should cancel the first episode of a new series because it perpetuates the myth that vaccines can cause autism. ABC's new drama, 'Eli Stone,' debuts on Thursday. It features British actor Jonny Lee Miller as a prophet-like lawyer who in the opening episode argues in court that a flu vaccine made a child autistic. When it is revealed in court that an executive at the fictional vaccine maker didn't allow his own child to get the shot, jurors side with the family, giving them a huge award... But, said Dr. Renee R. Jenkins, president of the influential American Academy of Pediatrics, 'A television show that perpetuates the myth that vaccines cause autism is the height of reckless irresponsibility on the part of ABC and its parent company, The Walt Disney Co. If parents watch this program and choose to deny their children immunizations, ABC will share in the responsibility for the suffering and deaths that occur as a result. The consequences of a decline in immunization rates could be devastating

to the health of our nation's children,' Jenkins said in a statement."

2) "[ABC defends show against outcry by pediatricians](#)" *Reuters* (Also ran on *Washington Post*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Vancouver Sun*) (January 28, 2008) - "The ABC network said on Monday it will go ahead with plans to air an episode of its new legal drama 'Eli Stone' despite objections from pediatricians who say the show may discourage parents from having their children immunized... On the show, a jury awards the boy's mother \$5.2 million in damages after it is revealed the CEO of the vaccine maker kept his own daughter from getting the company's vaccine because of autism concerns... The American Academy of Pediatrics, reacting to a synopsis of the 'Eli Stone' episode in a recent New York Times article, issued a statement criticizing the show as 'leaving audiences with the destructive idea that vaccines do cause autism.'... 'Many people trust the health information presented on fictional television shows, which influence their decisions about health care,' academy president Dr. Renee Jenkins wrote in a letter to Disney-ABC Television Group President Anne Sweeney....'In the United Kingdom, erroneous reports linking the measles vaccine to autism prompted a decline in vaccination and the worst outbreak of measles in two decades, including the deaths of several children,' Jenkins wrote."

3) "[First-episode controversy: The vaccine-autism link](#)" *USA Today* (January 28, 2008) - "The premiere episode of *Eli Stone*, in which a mother wins a \$5.2 million lawsuit charging her son got autism from a vaccine, is stirring controversy before it airs... Some advocacy groups believe the preservative thimerosal, which contains mercury and once was routinely used in childhood vaccinations, is linked to autism or other brain deficits. But several medical studies have concluded there is no link... David Kirby, author of the Huffington blog post and of the book *Evidence of Harm: Mercury in Vaccines and the Autism Epidemic: A Medical Controversy*, criticizes the letter, saying in his the post that it 'borders on near-hysteria over a fictional television entertainment. I don't have all the answers,' he adds in an interview, 'and my job is to keep asking questions. Definitely the jury is very much out' on any autism-vaccine link... But the jury is not out, counters Paul Offit, chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. There have been more than a dozen epidemiological studies and none proves a link, he says. 'I only hope that people see this as the fantasy that it is.'"

4) "[ABC Show Will Go on, Over Protest by Doctors](#)" *New York Times* (January 29, 2008) - "ABC said on Monday it would include a disclaimer about the plot line of the debut episode of the drama 'Eli Stone,' which links childhood vaccines to autism, and direct viewers to a government Web site that discredits such a link. ABC's decision follows a call by the American Academy of Pediatrics for ABC to cancel the opening episode of 'Eli Stone,' which is scheduled to be broadcast at 10 p.m. Thursday... The link between a vaccine preservative called thimerosal and autism has been debated for much of the last decade, but many scientific studies have failed to show any causal link between the two... The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the Institute of Medicine and the World Health Organization are among the organizations that have studied and rejected possible links between autism and the preservative in vaccines... ABC will present a written notice and voice-over saying: 'The following story is fictional and does not portray any actual persons, companies, products or events.' A second card will direct viewers to the Center for Disease Control's autism [Web site](#)."

5) "[Pediatricians call for ABC to cancel TV show linking vaccines and autism](#)" *Boston Globe* (January 28, 2008) - "A new ABC courtroom drama is drawing fire from a physicians' organization and local pediatricians over its verdict on vaccines and autism. The American Academy of Pediatrics is calling for ABC to pull Thursday night's debut of 'Eli Stone,' a courtroom drama... Dr. Robin Adair, assistant professor of pediatrics at University of Massachusetts Medical School, supports the academy's position. 'I agree with the concern that the show might frighten people away from vaccinating their children due to a risk that I think is fairly conclusively shown not to exist,' she said in an interview. 'Yes, it's put out there as entertainment, but these sorts of things can be influential.'"

6) "[Doctors Call on ABC to Pull Show Linking Autism and Vaccines](#)" *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (January 28, 2008) - "Pediatricians blasted ABC-TV on Monday afternoon for its plan to air a new television drama that apparently links autism and vaccines, calling on the network to cancel the episode... It's not a surprise ABC tackled the autism-vaccine debate. Despite a growing number of studies and research that discount vaccines as a primary trigger of autism, the debate rages... 'In fact, if I were Dr. Jenkins, I would be far more concerned about real news happening in the real world -- events that not only suggest the possibility of some sort of link between mercury, vaccines and autism, but might alarm parents more than any fictional account written for ratings-grabbing mass entertainment,' David Kirby, who has written extensively about autism and vaccines, wrote in 'Pediatricians, ABC and Censorship: Facts Are Scarier Than Fiction,' at The Huffington Post."

2. The 2008 National Influenza Vaccine Summit meeting will be held May 12-13, 2008, in Atlanta, Georgia. Please hold those dates. A draft agenda is being prepared for review by your Executive Committee and will be made available shortly.
3. There will be a CDC/Summit Communications call on Wednesday, January 30, at 3 PM Eastern. Already on the agenda is Mark Twyman from MedImmune to give a commercial update on FluMist. Please send other agenda items to [Alan Janssen](#) at the CDC. Thanks! Call in information is as follows: Toll Free: 866-421-9575; Participant Passcode: 8222501