

Opening Statement of Chairman Dan Burton
Government Reform Committee
Subcommittee on Human Rights & Wellness
“Truth Revealed: New Scientific Discoveries Regarding Mercury in
Medicine and Autism”
September 8, 2004

The Subcommittee is convening today to discuss the latest scientific research regarding the use of Mercury in medicine in the United States and the possible connection between these products and Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Subcommittee will also discuss the need for further research to determine the biological basis of autism, and how the Federal Government is working to decrease the occurrences of this health epidemic in the United States.

During my tenure as the Chairman of the Full Committee on Government Reform, and as the current Chair of this Subcommittee, I have convened no fewer than 20 hearings on the topics of Autism, vaccine safety, and the detrimental health effects of Mercury-containing medical products.

During these investigations, numerous scientists from around the globe have testified before the Committee, and have presented credible peer-reviewed research studies that indicated a direct link between the exposure of Mercury, a widely known neurotoxin, and the increasing incidences of autism.

Mercury has been present in medicines dispersed widely to the public for decades. Unbeknownst to most Americans, Mercury is still present in medicines we use everyday, including: eye drops, nasal spray, as well as many antifungal and anti-itch creams.

While the pharmaceutical industry has found new ways to manufacture many medicines and vaccinations that don't require the use Mercury, three (3) vaccines that currently remain on the MANDATORY pediatric vaccine schedule still contain the Mercury-derived preservative Thimerosal: DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertusis), Flu, and Hepatitis B.

Although I applaud the benefits that many vaccines have provided Americans over the years, I am perplexed as to why we are administering shots containing poisonous toxins to our children when technology has ceased the need for this otherwise harmful preservative.

The debate over whether or not there are linkages between Mercury and neurodevelopmental diseases has become more heated in recent times. Six years ago, when I started an investigation into the detrimental health effects of Mercury, the science supporting these claims was sparse.

Recently, credible researchers from many of our Nation's most highly regarded research universities have published studies noting the possible associations between Mercury and health defects.

Dr. Richard Deth, Professor at the College of Pharmaceutical Studies at Northeastern University, was the lead researcher in a collaboration between Johns Hopkins University, Tufts University, the University of Nebraska, and Northeastern University on a groundbreaking study into the possible correlation between increases in

environmental toxins such as thimerosal and incidences of autism. Dr. Deth will testify on the findings and future implications of his research.

Another innovative study was conducted at Columbia University recently. Released in June of this year, the researchers exposed mice to Thimerosal in doses and timing, which corresponds to the current pediatric immunization schedule.

The independent Columbia University study indicates that subjects with a specific genetic susceptibility toward autism are placed at a greater risk for neurodevelopmental diseases when administered Thimerosal-containing vaccines. Unfortunately, Dr. Mady Hornig, the lead researcher on this project, is unable to be with us this morning due to a personal emergency. In her place, Dr. Deth will present her oral testimony.

In a partnership between the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, and the University of Illinois - funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Development - participating scientists have begun looking at the neural science of autism on a wide-scale multi-million dollar project.

A brain-scanning technique identified as “fMRI”, or functional magnetic-resonance imaging, was used in this experiment to compare the brain activity of adults afflicted with high-functioning autism with non-autistic participants. The researchers then specifically examined two regions of the brain associated with language skills. To better explain the findings of this study, the Subcommittee has the pleasure of receiving testimony from Dr. Marcel Just, one of the lead researchers on this monumental study.

To discuss the implications of using Mercury in medical devices, the Subcommittee will be hearing testimony from my good friend, Dr. Richard Fischer, a

practicing dentist and representative of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT).

As many of us already know, the incidences of autism have become increasingly prevalent in modern-day society. Once considered a rare disease, effecting roughly 1 in 10,000 children, autism now affects 1.5 Million of our Nation's children, and this problem continues to escalate rapidly.

According to a recent "Autism Alarm" released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the American Academy of Pediatrics, currently 1 out of every 6 children are diagnosed with a developmental disorder and / or behavioral problem.

Even more alarming, today 1 out of every 166 children in the United States is being diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. This major healthcare crisis is clearly reaching epidemic proportions, and will not just simply "go away."

To address the current CDC observations with regard to the autism epidemic, the Subcommittee will be receiving testimony from Dr. Melinda Wharton, M.D. the Acting Deputy Director of the National Immunization Program at CDC, who will be speaking about information her office has collected regarding the incidence and prevalence of autism in the United States.

The FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER) is responsible for the regulation and oversight of vaccines administered in the United States. Dr. William Egan, Acting Director of the Office of Vaccines Research and Review at CBER will be testifying today on how the FDA has worked to reduce the exposure of thimerosal to children in the United States.

To give a perspective into the challenges facing the families of autistic individuals, Lyn Redwood, a Registered Nurse and mother of an autistic child will be informing the Subcommittee on these issues. In addition to her professional and personal obligations, Ms. Redwood is also the President and Founder of the Coalition for Safeminds (Sensible Action For Ending Mercury-Induced Neurological Disorders), an organization founded to investigate and raise awareness about the Autism Spectrum Disorders.

While the science behind the causation of autism is being deliberated, I firmly believe that we should take every precaution to ensure the health and well being of every American. By eliminating Mercury from medicine, we are taking a vital first step. As Hippocrates, the father of Medicine, stated in *Regimen of Health*, “A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings and learn how by his own thought to derive benefit from his illnesses.”

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being with us today to speak on this most important matter, and I look forward to hearing their testimony.