

Suspension of Legal Limits of Mercury Containing Vaccine for H1N1 Virus

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WHAT IS THIMEROSAL?

Thimerosal is a preservative containing ethyl mercury that has been used since the 1930s and is still used in the influenza vaccine and a small number of other vaccines. Influenza vaccine given to children under 3 is produced in single dose vials and is mercury free unless there is a shortage of that vaccine. A preservative is required by law in certain vaccines available in multi-dose vials to prevent bacteria from growing and causing serious disease or even death in the people who receive later doses from that vial.

Some people believe that mercury from vaccines is harmful. However, The American Academy of Pediatrics, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science and multiple other countries have concluded, based on scientific data, that thimerosal-containing vaccines are safe. There is no any credible scientific evidence that thimerosal from vaccines causes harm in any fashion.

WHY IS THERE A LIMIT ON THE AMOUNT OF MERCURY IN VACCINES IN WASHINGTON STATE?

Because of concern about mercury and vaccines, the WA state legislature passed a requirement that vaccines provided to pregnant women and children under 3 years of age should have essentially no mercury. The legislators were well meaning, but misinformed. There is no credible scientific evidence that the levels of mercury in ANY licensed vaccine cause harm. Because concern about thimerosal was seen as a barrier to immunization for some people, since 2001, all routinely recommended vaccines manufactured for administration to infants in the U.S. have been either thimerosal-free or have contained only extremely small amounts of thimerosal.

WHY ARE THE MERCURY LIMITS SUSPENDED FOR H1N1 VACCINE?

State law allows suspension of the mercury limits in vaccines if thimerosal-containing vaccine is needed to protect pregnant women and young children during a serious outbreak and if there is a shortage of vaccine. The H1N1 influenza outbreak causes serious infections in pregnant women, children and young people who might not be able to get vaccinated to protect against H1N1 influenza with the restrictions in place. Because the amount of thimerosal-free vaccine is limited, the mercury restrictions were lifted and all available H1N1 vaccines can now be used to protect people from infection.

More information about H1N1 disease and the vaccine can be found online at www.cdc.gov/h1n1