

## *Health*

### **Tax dollars pay for vaccine-damaged kids**

**By Evelyn Pringle**

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July 13, 2005—During the same time period that the number of doses of childhood vaccines nearly tripled and vaccination rates soared to nearly 95 percent for 5-year olds, the number of kids diagnosed with immune and brain system disorders skyrocketed. There is only one commonality in these children—they received vaccines that contained the mercury-based preservative thimerosal.

Vaccines are the only product whose use is mandated by law and all 50 states require children to be vaccinated before entering school. According to a 1999 report by the General Accounting Office (GAO), an estimated 12 million vaccinations are given to children every year across the country.

While licensing new vaccines and adding them to the childhood schedule, the government failed to add up the cumulative amounts of mercury that a child would receive in shots in one doctor's visit or over the course of the full vaccination schedule. But in 1999, while conducting a review of all products containing mercury, the government finally realized that mercury exposure from vaccines grossly exceeded safety guidelines set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

As a consequence, there has been a doubling of learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, and between a 300 to 600 percent increase in autism in most states at precisely the same time that the number of vaccinations tripled.

Since the government literally forced children to be vaccinated with products containing thimerosal for decades, it now has an obligation to find a cure for the epidemic of autism and other vaccine related disorders and to hold the vaccine-makers financially responsible for the damage caused by their products.

In the absence of a cure and drug company accountability, taxpayers in every state in the nation will be forced to carry the life-time load of educating and caring for a generation of injured people, and their state and local taxes will go through the roof.

These increasingly common disorders are forcing public school systems to hire record numbers of newly trained professionals and build special education classrooms to meet the needs of these children.

Autistic students are the fastest-growing segment of special education students nationwide and schools lack specifically trained personnel to work with autistic children, as well as policies defining what appropriate services are. The school systems were caught completely unprepared for this epidemic.

Unlike normal children, children with autism do not instinctively learn from a natural environment. They must be taught even the simplest skills such as making eye contact, waiting in line, following directions or how to hold a conversation. Behaviors, skills, and abilities vary from one child to the next and about half of autistic children have few or no language skills. They also may suffer from other problems that impair learning, such as hearing loss or epilepsy.

On February 15, the General Accounting Office (GAO), released a report, titled "Special Education Children With Autism," that revealed the number of children ages 6 through 21 diagnosed with autism receiving services has increased more than 500 percent over the past 10 years, from under 20,000 in 1993 to almost 120,000 in 2002.

The cost of educating the increased number of autistic kids is predictable and enormous. The Department of Education spends about \$53 billion a year on K-12 education. If it provides \$60,000 per year to educate each of the currently identified school-age autistic children nationwide, the price tag will be over \$7 billion a year, or about 13 percent of the department's entire budget. And by the end of each year, the cost will be even higher than that because the increased number of autistic kids entering the system each year is not waning.

Special education costs are so high because staff requirements are high. For instance, in a program that serves Minneapolis, Minnesota, students, each classroom usually has six students with staff consisting of one licensed special ed teacher and two special ed assistants. Toddler classrooms have one licensed special ed teacher and one special ed assistant with four students. Services provided by social workers, occupational therapists, speech and language clinicians, and adapted physical education teachers are also available at each site based on individual student needs.

But the educational services reflect only part of the costs that taxpayers will have to bear. Other costs include tuition for summer programs to help students retain learned skills, transportation costs, psychological and behavioral evaluations.

State and local governments are already scrambling to find ways to meet the needs of autistic children.

The New York Center for Autism Charter School will open this fall in a Manhattan public school. At full capacity, the school plans to educate 28 children, 5 to 14 years old, with a one-to-one ratio of staff members to children, in a full-day 12-month program. Children will be admitted by lottery, according to the May 4 New York Times.

The school will receive more than \$60,000 per student in public money for special ed needs, compared to the \$8,586 given for normally developing children at charter schools.

The city's Department of Education says 3,788 autistic children are enrolled in the public system, 786 of them educated at private schools, with their fees paid by the city, the Times reports.

School systems throughout Pennsylvania are feeling the pressure. Statewide, in 10 years, the number of school-age children in special ed for autism disorders has increased more than eight-fold, from 634 to 5,145 in 2002–03, the most recent year for which state statistics are available.

Since 1999–2000, the number of Bucks County Pennsylvania school-age autistic children receiving special ed services has jumped at least 22 percent every year, according to the US Department of Education.

The September 12, 2004, Bucks County Courier reported: "In 1993–94, the county had 64 kids. In 2002–03, it had 448—a 700 percent increase. No other special education category comes close to the same yearly growth rate."

In Bucks County, for tuition, transportation, evaluations, and other services, the price tag can reach \$60,000 per child. That's far more than the additional \$7,000 in school services that the average special education student receives, David Mandell, co-chairman of the Pennsylvania Autism Task Force, told the Courier.

For California schools, in December 2003, the National School Board Association quoted the Sacramento Bee, and reported that the number of autistic students in California has doubled over the past four years

at a cost of up to \$60,000 a student per year. That translates to 13 percent of the state's student population or 20,377 children.

According to the March 25 Chicago Tribune, the figures from the Illinois Autism and PDD Training and Technical Assistance Project show that 1,960 children between the ages of 3 to 21 received special ed services for autism during the 1996–97 school year, compared to 6,125 children in 2002–03.

In Michigan, the April 27 Detroit News reported that the number of autism cases among people ages 6–22 grew fourfold from 1993 to 2003, to 7,259.

Education officials in Wayne County Michigan, said the cost of its Autistic Impaired Program has increased from \$35.5 million in 2002 to \$58.8 million for 2005.

The number of students in the Impaired Program in the Macomb Intermediate School District increased from 142 kids in 29 classrooms 10 years ago, to 338 autistic kids in 45 classrooms in 2005.

Schools in Oakland County, Michigan, saw a 40 percent increase in children with autism between December 2002 and December 2004 when the cases went from 786 to 1,015, the Detroit News reported.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education currently identifies 2,801 children between the ages of 3 and 21 as autistic, up from 294 children in 1991.

The group, Research & Education for Autistic Children's Treatment, determined that between 1989 and 1999 the number of school age kids with autism in Oregon increased from 250 cases to 2,877 cases, according to the state's Department of Education statistics.

In dealing with this epidemic, the first order of business must be to find a way to force the government to ban thimerosal in all vaccines. Unbeknownst to many people, thimerosal is still in some vaccines.

The EPA recommends ingesting no more than 0.1 micrograms of mercury and the FDA recommends no more than 0.4 micrograms per day for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and small children, which amounts to a recommendation that they eat no more than 12 ounces of tuna per week, because the EPA says, "mercury consumed by a pregnant or nursing woman or by a young child can harm the developing brain and nervous system."

Yet the CDC still recommends that children aged 6 to 23 months and pregnant women get the flu vaccine with its 25 micrograms of mercury which amounts to 250 times the safety limit for mercury intake set by the EPA for fish-eaters.

Unless a cure is found or drug companies are held financially responsible, state and local taxes are going to have to be increased to cover the cost of educating and caring for these injured children. It's inevitable.

And its sad to say that this is likely the aspect of the whole vaccine-autism controversy that will in the end get the public's full attention.

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