**Today’s piece was prepared by Ramsey Tate, MD based on an ABC News article, “New Ad 'Demands' Mercury-Free Flu Vaccine: SafeMind Launches New Campaign to Target Big City Moviegoers”.**

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/ColdandFlu/ad-demands-mercury-free-flu-vaccine/story?id=12196175>

This article describes an ongoing video campaign by SafeMinds, a non-profit organization founded on the belief that autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders result from mercury toxicity. In its most ambitious campaign to date, SafeMinds is airing a video message in movie theaters in nine major cities beginning the day after Thanksgiving. At issue is the presence of the mercury-containing preservative, thimerosal, in multi-dose vials of influenza vaccine. SafeMinds proposes that mercury is particularly dangerous to pregnant women, nursing mother, infants, and children. [The 3-minute SafeMinds video can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlJKQGw-sJA&feature=related>.] The ABC News article appropriately mentions the absence of evidence supporting a link between mercury-containing compounds and autism and identifies that influenza vaccines that do not contain thimerosal are available. Additionally, the article quotes physicians who highlight the importance of influenza vaccination. The article suggests that the purpose of the SafeMinds video campaign is to encourage patients to request influenza vaccines that are thimerosal-free, rather than to avoid vaccination.

Although the ABC News article discounts the claim that thimerosal has a causal relationship with neurodevelopmental disorders, it does not address specific claims made in the SafeMinds video, such as “The safety and effectiveness of flu vaccines for pregnant women or nursing mothers has never been established,” nor does it directly reference the existing body of evidence supporting the safety of influenza vaccination. In addition, the ABC News article portrays the video message as more balanced and supportive of influenza vaccination than the video is likely to be interpreted by viewers. The SafeMinds video does not propose alternatives to mercury-containing influenza vaccines until over 2 minutes into the 3 minute message. Audiences may have difficulty discerning the distinction between SafeMind’s concerns regarding mercury toxicity and the broader suggestions also conveyed by the video that influenza vaccines are unsafe.

The breadth of this media campaign by SafeMinds is staggering. As the ABC News articles notes, the holiday season attracts a high volume of moviegoers and SafeMinds is hoping for 500,000 viewers. Pediatricians, family physicians, and obstetricians should anticipate renewed concern about thimerosal and the safety of influenza vaccines this influenza season and be prepared to direct patients to credible sources of information.

**Thimerosal and Influenza Vaccination Resources:**

# Thimerosal and 2010-2011 Seasonal Flu Vaccines Q&A (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/thimerosal.htm>

Pregnant Women & Influenza (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm>

Price CS et al. Prenatal and Infant Exposure to **Thimerosal** From Vaccines and Immunoglobulins and Risk of Autism. Pediatrics 2010: 126(4), 656-664. Available at: http://pediatrics.aappublications.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/cgi/content/full/126/4/656?maxtoshow=&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=thimerosal&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&volume=126&issue=4&resourcetype=HWCIT

[Cedillo v. Secretary of Health and Human Services Case No. 98-916V](http://www.uscfc.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/vaccine_files/Hastings-Cedillo.pdf) (Special Master Ruling regarding thimerosal and autism):

http://www.uscfc.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/vaccine\_files/Hastings-Cedillo.pdf

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!