Mercury Rising: Warnings in Pregnancy and Infancy

Written by Jeanne Ohm, D.C.
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Mercury: a Known Toxin

It has been known for a long time, that mercury is a toxic and dangerous substance that effects the developing nerve system in an adverse way. Web MD offers this report:

“Mercury is very dangerous to children. Relatively low concentrations keep a child's brain from developing normally. Kids with mercury poisoning have problems with thinking, language, memory, motor skills, perception, and behavior.”

Although warnings of toxic mercury exposure have gone significant years, routine administration of mercury to pregnant women and children has not been as clearly defined for the consumers.

Mercury in Foods

Caution about eating too much fish is in pregnancy and while nursing because of mercury exposure has had frequent media coverage. Web MD writes, “Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet, however, rarely all fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury. Some studies have found dangerously high levels of mercury in some fish enough to cause harm to an unborn baby or a young child’s developing nervous system. This is a cause for concern for the health of women of childbearing age, those who are part of it will end up in our nervous system, in our brain, and it’s there that it causes a variety of symptoms.”

In an interview, pediatrician said, “We know that high levels of mercury can impact the cognitive development as well as the growth and development of a young child.” What the report appears to be saying is that while overweight Americans may resort to fish to stave off unwanted pounds, too much fish in their diet could reduce the IQ more than the weight.

Mercury in Vaccines

Thimerosal, a mercury derivative has been routinely used as a preservative in vaccines. For years, grassroots groups have worried about the potential hazards of vaccine ingredients including the presence of mercury in vaccines should be removed as soon as possible.” The FDA and PhR said that because of the concern about mercury in vaccines, some children would be exposed to “a cumulative level of mercury over the first six months of life that exceeded one of the federal guidelines on methyl mercury.”

Hospitals around the country responded by testing the administration of the thimerosal-containing vaccine for hepatitis B at birth, deferring vaccination until the baby was older and more developed, an effort to reduce parental harms. Numerous studies were published giving a false sense of security to parents. One study published in the Lancet November 2003 hit the media with this misperceived headline: “Mercury levels in Vaccines Are Safe. Study Suggests Infants Are Not at Risk.”

How much mercury is your child exposed to?

Although warnings of toxic mercury exposure have gone significant years, routine administration of mercury to pregnant women and children has not been as clearly defined for the consumers.
The CDC further states:

“Two groups are most vulnerable to methyl mercury: the fetus and pregnant women. Premature babies are more vulnerable because they tend to be very small and their brain is not as developed as a full term baby”.

Richard Weisman, MD, a toxicologist at the University of Miami School of Medicine and director of the Poison Control Center for South Florida tells us, “There is no doubt that mercury is one of the worst [toxins affecting the brain]”.

Although warnings of toxic mercury exposure has gotten significant press, routine administration of mercury to pregnant women and children has not been as clearly defined for the consumer.

**Mercury in Foods**

Cautions about eating too much fish in pregnancy and while nursing because of mercury exposure has had frequent media coverage. MY Web MD writes, “Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet, however nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury. Some studies have found dangerously high levels of mercury in some fish enough to cause harm to an unborn baby or a young child’s developing nervous system. This is a cause for concern for the health of women of childbearing age, those who are nursing, and young children. To protect the developing fetus from the effects of mercury in fish, the U.S. FDA advises against eating shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish during pregnancy and in women of childbearing age. Some states also urge expectant moms to limit canned tuna consumption to 7 ounces a week. “

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The title “Canned tuna or canned poison?” was the teaser for a CBS 2 News “Health Watch” report that focused on high levels of mercury found in tuna and the possible health risks associated with them. CBS reporter Paul Moniz quoted a number of physicians, who observed effects of the toxic substance, “Once it gets into our bodies, a substantial part of it will end up in our nervous system, in our brains, and it’s there that it causes a variety of symptoms.”

An interviewed pediatrician said, “We know that high levels of mercury can impair the cognitive development as well as the growth and development of a young child.” What the report appears to be revealing is that while overweight Americans may resort to fish to shed unwanted pounds, too much fish in their diets could reduce the IQ more than the waistline.  

Mercury in Vaccines

Thimerosal, a mercury derivative has been routinely used as a preservative in vaccines. For years, grass roots groups have warned about the potential hazards of vaccine ingredients including the presence of mercury in vaccines. However, until the vaccine/mercury/autism relationship was officially reported, the public was virtually clueless about the presence of this neurotoxin in vaccines and its adverse effects. Thanks to the continued efforts of various consumer groups there have been significant strides in educating the public and government officials about their concerns of mercury in vaccines. These efforts have eventually brought forth a wave of awareness, new policy and research.  

On July 7, 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the United States Public Health Service finally issued a joint statement that because of the “neuro-developmental effects posed by exposure to thimerosal”, “thimerosal-containing vaccines should be removed as soon as possible.” The PHS and AAP recognized that because of thimerosal in vaccines, some children would be exposed to “a cumulative level of mercury over the first six months of life that exceeded one of the federal guidelines on methyl mercury.” Hospitals around the country responded by halting the administration of the thimerosal containing vaccine for hepatitis B at birth, deferring vaccination until the baby was older and more developed.

In an effort to reduce parental fears, numerous studies were published giving a false sense of security to parents. One study published in the Lancet, November 2003 hit the media with this misrepresented headline: “Mercury Levels in Vaccines Are Safe: Study Suggests Infants Are
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Not at Risk” 5 This small study examined mercury levels in the blood, urine, and stool of 40 infants given vaccinations containing thimerosal and 21 infants who received thimerosal-free vaccines and showed that in a 60 day period, there was virtually no mercury in the blood.

But Neal Halsey, MD, director of the Institute for Vaccine Safety at Baltimore’s Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health had this warning to heed, “This is a good study, and it helps us to understand the metabolism of ethyl mercury associated with thimerosal, but one thing we don’t know from this study is what the peak levels of mercury are shortly after vaccination.” Halsey cautioned the definitive answer to the safety question is at least several years away. That is when results are expected from a separate government follow-up study of children exposed to differing levels of thimerosal.

“Everyone has a small amount of mercury in their body from different exposures,” he tells WebMD. “The question is what level is associated with harm in young children.” 5

Perhaps a more accurate title for the article would have been “Safety of Toxic Mercury Levels in Children Following Vaccines Remains Unknown.” Then perhaps parents and expectant mothers would question proponents as to why mercury remains in diptheria, tetanus, meningiococcus, and flu vaccines.

About the Flu Vaccine

The product package inserts for the flu vaccine published by the manufacturers state the disclaimer that “Animal reproduction studies have not been conducted with influenza virus
vaccine. It is also not known whether influenza virus vaccine can cause fetal harm when administered to a pregnant woman… Although animal reproductive studies have not been conducted, the prescribing health-care provider should be aware of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices… The ACIP states that, if used during pregnancy, administration of influenza virus vaccine after 14 weeks of gestation may be preferable to avoid coincidental association of the vaccine with early pregnancy loss…”

Additional reading and phone calls to the manufacturers confirmed that flu vaccines contain thimerosal, a mercury derivative preservative banned by the FDA in over-the-counter drug preparations because of questions over safety. 6

In spite of the growing concern in the literature about the relationship between mercury and neuro-developmental effects posed by exposure to thimerosal, in 2002, the CDC announced their recommendation for flu vaccines for infants under the age of two. 7 Additionally, pregnant women are included in the population advised to get the flu vaccine. However the flu vaccine as stated above currently remains one of the vaccines with the highest content of thimerosal.

The Rhogam Vaccine

What has not been publicized at all is the presence of the mercury derivative, thimerosal, in the rhogam shot given to RH Negative expectant mothers and its consequential effects on her unborn child.

Stephen Marini, DC, PhD informs us “the Physicians Desk Reference 8 cautions that the use of rhogam during pregnancy can have adverse effects on the fetus. The high mercury content of the rhogam preparation can have serious neurological consequences on the developing fetus. Hair analysis of unvaccinated children born from moms injected with rhogam demonstrate the presence of mercury. First, expectant mothers should question the rationale for rhogam injections in pregnancy. Second, if rhogam administration during pregnancy is absolutely necessary, then expectant mothers should demand mercury-free rhogam. Mercury-free rhogam is available in this country from Bayer Pharmaceuticals under their product name of BayRoh-D. This mercury free product has been available since 1996. Their number is 800-468- 0894.” WinRho SDF, made by the Cangene Corp., is a freeze-dried product that contains no preservatives.
Dr. Marini further states, “During pregnancy there is no mixing of mother’s blood with baby blood. Giving mom rhogam after the baby’s birth is sufficient to reduce the risk of HDN in her next child to about 1-2%. Rhogam is also indicated if the mom has an abortion, either natural or induced, or has abdominal trauma or an amniocentesis. Giving rhogam during pregnancy can reduce the risk of HDN by less than 1%. It is doubtful that the slight benefit acquired by giving rhogam during pregnancy outweighs the risks to the fetus from the injection.”

Dawn Richardson, President of Parents Requesting Open Vaccine Education (PROVE) did a quick internet search and came up with this CDC post:

- “Q. Who is most vulnerable to mercury?”
- “A. Two groups are most vulnerable to methyl mercury: the fetus and children ages 14 and younger.”

Her continued searching on the National Library of Medicine site almost effortlessly produced hundreds of articles and studies in medical and scientific journals clearly documenting the damaging effects of prenatal exposure to mercury. The results of one recent study published in the August 1, 1999 issue of the American Journal of Epidemiology stated that “the greatest susceptibility to methylmercury neurotoxicity occurs during late gestation, while early postnatal vulnerability is less”. Ludicrously, this is the precise point in time that ACIP and the CDC recommends women to get the rhogam shot.

Acquiring the Facts

Since the safety of vaccines remains unclear, expectant and new parents must take on the responsibility of becoming informed and making decisions for their families accordingly. If vaccines containing mercury are recognized to be toxic to children, then it seems logical that mothers should avoid mercury containing vaccines throughout pregnancy and while nursing as well.
It is imperative that parents take on the responsibility of becoming informed by unbiased organizations that do not rely on studies funded and potentially manipulated by self interest groups. Not all studies are as objective as we are led to believe.

The CDC’s study released in the November 2003 issue of Pediatrics was one such study. On the surface, it appeared to “prove” there was no relationship between vaccines and autism. Press-releases around the country smugly announced the results of the study, as if to disqualify all grass roots claims about the toxicity of mercury in vaccines.

However, when looked at closely, medical reviewers of the CDC study charged that it was rife with data manipulation, with the effect to sabotage the results. Congress, Rep. Dave Weldon (R-FL.) reviewed the study and declared this in his letter to the CDC, “I have serious reservations about the four-year evolution and conclusions of this study. A review of these documents leaves me very concerned that rather than seeking to understand whether or not some children were exposed to harmful levels of mercury in childhood vaccines in the 1990s, there may have been a selective use of the data to make the associations in the earliest study disappear.” 11

It is also important that parents do not allow their practitioners to intimidate them by citing rhetoric and tainted data, either. Parents must actively seek providers that support and encourage their right to choose health and lifestyle choices for their families. Your Family Chiropractor has developed relationships with practitioners of like mindedness in your community. Additionally, Doctors of Chiropractic are known for their ability to stay on top of a variety of current family health concerns including the debatable issue of vaccinations. Ask your DC for national and local organizations where you as parents will be able to find dependable resources when making lifetime choices for your family’s well-being. 12

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