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Autism and thimerosal-containing vaccines: lack of consistent evidence for an association.

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BACKGROUND: In 1999, concerns were raised that vaccines containing the preservative Thimerosal might increase the risk of autism and/or other neurodevelopmental disorders. **METHODS:** Between the mid-1980s through the late-1990s, we compared the prevalence/incidence of autism in California, Sweden, and Denmark with average exposures to Thimerosal-containing vaccines. Graphic ecologic analyses were used to examine population-based data from the United States (national immunization coverage surveys and counts of children diagnosed with autism-like disorders seeking special education services in California); Sweden (national inpatient data on autism cases, national vaccination coverage levels, and information on use of all vaccines and vaccine-specific amounts of Thimerosal); and Denmark (national registry of inpatient/outpatient-diagnosed autism cases, national vaccination coverage levels, and information on use of all vaccines and vaccine-specific amounts of Thimerosal).

RESULTS: In all three countries, the incidence and prevalence of autism-like disorders began to rise in the 1985-1989 period, and the rate of increase accelerated in the early 1990s. However, in contrast to the situation in the United States, where the average Thimerosal dose from vaccines increased throughout the 1990s, Thimerosal exposures from vaccines in both Sweden and Denmark-already low throughout the 1970s and 1980s-began to decrease in the late 1980s and were eliminated in the early 1990s.

CONCLUSIONS: The body of existing data, including the ecologic data presented herein, is not consistent with the hypothesis that increased exposure to Thimerosal-containing vaccines is responsible for the apparent increase in the rates of autism in young children being observed worldwide.

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