

Statement from Julie Louise Gerberding, M.D., M.P.H, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, regarding Weldon Amendment (July 16, 2007)

CDC strongly opposes the proposed amendment, prohibiting use of Federal funds for purchase of influenza vaccine containing thimerosal for use in children 6-35 months of age during the 2008-2009 season. Our national immunization policies must be based on science. Some of our nation's best scientists, convened by the Institute of Medicine, agree that science supports the safety of thimerosal-containing vaccines. Scientists and citizens also agree that our youngest and most vulnerable citizens - our children - must be protected from influenza, and vaccination is by far the best way to protect them.

More specifically:

There is no scientific basis to support a prohibition of use of thimerosal-containing vaccine. In particular, science does not support a causal association between thimerosal and autism. In fact, the Institute of Medicine concluded that "the evidence favors rejection of a causal relationship between thimerosal-containing vaccines and autism."

CDC respects this IOM conclusion.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, a diverse group of expert advisors on vaccine use, has made its position explicitly clear: "The benefits of influenza vaccination for all recommended groups, including pregnant women and young children, outweigh the unproven risk from thimerosal exposure through vaccination." Instead, ACIP recommends that children and adults who need vaccination may receive any available vaccine preparation licensed for use in the person's age- and risk factor-group, with or without thimerosal.

The supply of thimerosal-free vaccine is increasing but we do not know precisely how many doses of vaccine licensed for use in children 6-35 months of age will be available in 2008-2009. Based on information from the manufacturers, the supply is not likely to be large enough to vaccinate all the children whose parents want this protection for them. Even if the supply increases more than we expect, the realities of vaccine distribution make it impossible to precisely align supply with vaccine demand in every practice or community.

Passage of the proposed amendment would mean that some children would not have access to influenza vaccine because the supply would be reduced. Tragically, some of these unvaccinated children would suffer the more severe consequences of influenza, even though vaccination would otherwise have helped protect them. For this reason, CDC strongly opposes the proposed amendment.