

There IS a link between the MMR jab and autism, claims new research

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There IS a link between the MMR jab and autism, claims new research

EXCLUSIVE

By Rachel Ellis, Medical Correspondent

A key study repeatedly used by the Government to support the MMR vaccine was wrongly carried out and gave inaccurate results, experts claimed yesterday.

The Danish research, which examined the medical records of more than half-a-million children born over eight years, concluded there was no link between children given MMR and the onset of autism.

But fresh analysis of the data by four experts to be published this week in the Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons suggest there is a link.

The first new study, by Dr Samy Suissa, an epidemiologist at McGill University, Montreal, who looked at the same data the Danish doctors used, concludes that children who received the triple jab were 45 per cent more likely to develop autism than those who were not given it.

A second piece of research – by Dr Fouad Yazbak, an American paediatrician – shows a 400 per cent rise in autism after the introduction of MMR in Denmark, even after taking into account greater awareness of the condition.

And a third study by Dr Andrew Wakefield, who first made the link between MMR and autism in 1998, and Dr Carol Stott of Cambridge University, shows autism cases in Denmark have increased by 14.8 per cent each year since MMR was introduced.

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The findings will be a blow to the Government and supporters of MMR who have relied heavily on the Danish study to dispel concerns about the safety of the jab. They come at a time when the Government's immunisation programme is once again in the spotlight following the announcement earlier this month of a new five-in-one vaccine for babies.

For parents, the new research will add still further to the confusion about MMR.

Dr Wakefield, formerly of London's Royal Free Hospital, now works at a school and research centre for children with developmental disorders in Texas. He believes the Danish study was flawed because it made too many assumptions.

"Many of the children in the original study were too young to be vaccinated or too young to have received a diagnosis of autism. That was a mistake," he said.

"In order to include them in the study, an age adjustment was carried out but that was inappropriate. It assumes that children we have not ascertained data about because they were too young were representative of the older population.

"When the data was reanalysed without the age adjustment, there was a significant excess risk of MMR in children with autism against the controls. The original Danish study has been used as a rod to beat those who believe MMR may be linked to autism.

"It was considered to be the definitive study which showed that there is no link.

This new study underlines how statistics can be deceptive and misleading."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Health said the original Danish study had been reviewed by the Institute of Medicine in Washington and no problems had been raised about the validity of the data.

She added: "There have been many other studies that have come to the same conclusion – that there is no link between MMR and autism."