with the children's parents; the other half underwent 2 years of intervention through providers in the community who would otherwise be available for children with ASD.

Compared to the children in the community intervention group, those who received ESDM showed improvements in IQ, their ability to adapt, and the severity of their ASD diagnosis. The authors conclude that "results of this study underscore the importance of early detection of and intervention in autism." (Dawson G et al: Pediatrics, originaliy published online 2010; e17-e23; DOI 10.1542/ peds.2009-0958)

...And The “Final Word” On The Role Of Vaccines As A Cause Of Autism

While few experts doubt that ASD is increasing, the cause for this problem remains unclear. Twelve years ago, the notion that vaccines might cause autism, and in particular, that the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) childhood vaccine might be the culprit, received worldwide attention as a result of an article published in a prominent British medical journal (The Lancet) by Dr. Andrew Wakefield and his colleagues. That article resulted in many parents choosing not to vaccinate their children, and in subsequent outbreaks of the illnesses that would have been protected by the vaccines; it also led to over 25 studies that were conducted to see if there was indeed a relationship between the vaccine and autism; the studies consistently found no evidence of a link. Over the years, most of Dr. Wakefield’s colleagues have admitted that the interpretation of their findings was incorrect, but Dr. Wakefield refused to retract his findings, leaving many parents to believe that, despite all the other studies, there may be truth to the original Lancet report.

In January of this year, Britain’s General Medical Council, its highest medical board, declared that Dr. Wakefield was guilty of both dishonesty and irresponsibility, arguing that he subjected children to unnecessary and painful procedures and operated in an unethical manner. He also failed to tell the Lancet that the study had been funded from sources that wanted to take legal action against the vaccine manufacturer, and that he himself had a patent application for a new vaccine.

The Lancet, in a brief statement, has now stated that, based on the Board’s findings, “we fully retract this paper from the published record.” (The Editors of The Lancet: The Lancet, page 445, February 6, 2010)

COMMENT: Such a complete retraction of a medical paper is highly unusual, and in our view it was long overdue. As long as 12 years ago, Dr. Wakefield’s work was criticized for its poor science and over-the-top interpretation of its findings. Unfortunately, the public anxiety it created led to more than 2 dozen papers designed to see whether his ideas could be correct. Though no reputable scientist could repeat his study findings and 25 studies found no evidence to support his findings, the many millions of dollars that were spent on those studies—and the decades it took to conduct
them—could have been better devoted to research on other possible causes of autism and intervention studies that might help children who have ASD.

The Lancet retraction should signal the end of the view that vaccines cause autism, and we can only hope that researchers can now devote themselves to finding the true causes in an effort to prevent children being affected in the future, and that funding can now be directed towards interventions to improve the lives of the many children who now have ASD.

ENVIRONMENT

More Caution On Products Containing BPA

Bisphenol A (BPA) is an industrial chemical that has been present in many hard plastic bottles and metal-based food and beverage cans since the 1960s. When concerns were raised about possible health effects that might result from exposure to BPA, especially among pregnant women and children, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration offered reassurance about its safety. However, based on results from recent studies that were able to test for subtle effects, both the National Toxicology Program of the U.S. National Institutes of Health and the FDA have raised concern about the potential effects of BPA on brain, behavior, and the prostate gland in fetuses, infants, and young children.

Federal agencies are carrying out more detailed studies to better understand these possible risks, but in the meantime the FDA notes that it is attempting to reduce exposure to BPA in the food supply by stopping production of BPA-containing baby bottles and infant feeding cups, working on alternatives to BPA for the linings of infant formula cans, and working to reduce or replace BPA in other food can linings.

At the same time, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has prepared a fact sheet on BPA for parents. Among the points it highlights are:

- While packaging for powdered infant formula doesn't have detectable BPA, there are small amounts of the chemical in cans that contain infant formula; if you are using those cans, do not heat them on the stove or in boiling water. Ready-to-feed infant formula can be served at room temperature or gently warmed in a nursing bottle by running warm water over the outside of the bottle.
- The following companies have assured FDA that, as of January, 2009, they have not manufactured baby bottles and infant feeding cups using BPA for the U.S. market. They include Avent, Doctor Brown's Natural Flow, Evenflow, First Essentials, Gerber, Munchkin, Nuk, and Playtex. Because these companies account for more than 90% of these products in the U.S. market, consumers may want to discard older bottles and cups and purchase the newer, BPA-free products.
- In general, plastics are very unlikely to have BPA unless the recycle code on the bottom is marked with a 3 or 7; plastics with either of those 2 numbers may contain BPA.
- Discard scratched baby bottles and infant feeding cups, since the scratches can harbor germs and can release small amounts of BPA. This same guidance applies to all food containers.
- Since hot or boiling liquids can lead to the release of BPA from packaging that contains the chemical, parents should not put very hot water, infant formula, or other liquids into BPA-containing bottles when preparing them for a child.
- Before mixing water with powdered infant formula, the water should be boiled in a BPA-free container and allowed to cool to lukewarm.
- Always remember: Whether or not a bottle contains BPA, do not heat baby bottles of any kind in the microwave—the liquid may heat unevenly and burn your infant. Also, sterilize and clean bottles according to instructions on infant formula labels. They should be left to cool to room temperature before adding infant formula.
- As for other baby products, BPA is not found in the part of the pacifier that a baby places in his mouth (the hard plastic shield may have BPA, but that is unlikely to produce much exposure). Also, children's toys made of plastics are not generally made with BPA. (www.hhs.gov/safety/bpa/)

March 2010