

# Vaccination may trigger disease linked to autism

By Celia Hall, Medical Editor

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BRITISH doctors have discovered a new bowel disease in children that they believe causes autism and that could be triggered by the vaccination for measles, mumps and rubella.

But they have not proved a link with the MMR vaccine and are divided on how best to advise parents. The doctors cannot show if what they have found is coincidence or the very first cases of a serious childhood illness with wide implications for the MMR vaccination programme.

Next month, the team from the Royal Free Hospital Hampstead, London, will meet Sir Kenneth Calman, the Chief Medical Officer, who has called for a meeting to discuss issues raised by the new findings.

The meeting is being organised by the Medical Research Council and will be chaired by Sir John Pattison, a council adviser.

The study - published today in The Lancet - says that 12 children who had previously developed normally were given tests and scans. All had disorders of their intestines, nine had diagnoses of autism and in eight, the parents' or the child's GP said the changes in health and behaviour followed MMR vaccination in six days on average. In another series of patients, 46 out of 48 children had the bowel and behaviour symptoms.

The Royal Free has another 700 children waiting to be assessed. "We were very, very surprised. We expected we might see one or two in the second group," said Dr Andy Wakefield of the hospitals inflammatory bowel disease study group, who led the research.

The new disease, which the team has called ileal-lymphoid-nodular hyperplasia, produces lymph swellings

of lymph nodes in the intestine and patchy, recurring inflammation.

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Dr Wakefield is also expected to show the presence of measles virus in the intestine at two international meetings this summer. He believes that the three vaccines should be given separately. But some of his colleagues say that there is not enough evidence and have called for more research.

"There is not a consensus among us as to what should happen next. I believe this syndrome has appeared since MMR . . . . There is sufficient concern in my own mind for a case to be made for vaccines to be given individually at not less than one year intervals."

"For the vast majority of children, the MMR vaccine is fine but I believe there are sufficient anxieties for a case to be made to administer the three vaccinations separately." Dr Wakefield said.

However, Prof Arie Zuckerman, dean of the Royal Free Hospital Medical School, said: "It is absolutely essential to everyone that we do not dent the immunisation programme because it is children who will suffer."

Autism has already been linked to other forms of bowel disease in children. Doctors believe opioids, chemicals released during digestion, are not properly absorbed by an inflamed bowel and reach the brain, where they cause damage at a crucial stage of a child's development.

[More than 1,350 parents have registered with solicitors with a view to claiming compensation](#) for damage to their children following MMR vaccination.

Pasteur Mérieux MSD, which supplies vaccine to the Department of Health, said: "It would be unfortunate if the results of controversial studies such as these resulted in a drop in public confidence in the vaccine, which the vast majority of the informed medical profession supports totally."

[12 September 1997: Child vaccine link to bowel diseases is dismissed](#)