

## Study finds no vaccine-autism link

By Robert Bazell

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Nov. 6 — It is one of the most emotional issues in medicine — the fear that a childhood vaccine might cause autism, a permanent, emotional disturbance that appears at just about the same time in life when kids get their shots. But research out of Denmark Wednesday offers strong reassurance that the two are not linked.

SOPHIA AUGIER has three sons with autism — a severe brain disorder that leaves children unable to have normal interactions with others. She knows of the concerns about vaccines.

“There is a slight part of me that says ‘wonder if.’ And you just never know,” she said.

At the Cleveland Clinic’s Center for Autism where the Augier boys are treated, the director says many parents have similar worries — especially because the number of children diagnosed with autism has risen sharply across the country in recent years. Also, a recent study in California found that the rate of autism had tripled in just a decade.

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### **STORY** [Autism cases leap in California](#)

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“We spend a lot of time reassuring parents that autism is not something you catch. It’s not something you did to your child,” said the clinic’s director Vanessa Jensen.

Doctors know that genetics plays a big role in autism, but they don’t know much about other causes. MMR, the combined vaccine for measles,

mumps and rubella, has gotten a lot of attention since a 1998 report suggested a possible link.

But in the research out Wednesday in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, doctors in Denmark studied medical records of 400,000 children who got the MMR vaccine — and almost 100,000 did not. There was actually slightly less autism in the kids who had been vaccinated.

“I can’t imagine a stronger study. And I can’t imagine this result being incorrect,” said Dr. Loring Dales of the California Department of Health Services.

So why the increase in autism? Many experts say it is a matter of better diagnosis — children who would have been classified as mentally retarded a decade ago are now called autistic.

With MMR ruled out as a cause, some parents groups worry about the role of other vaccines and that tiny amounts of mercury might be the cause of neurological damage. Mercury was used as a preservative in some other vaccines until manufacturers eliminated most of it a few years ago.

But most experts point out there is no solid evidence linking mercury to autism — big studies are underway — and they say it is critical to remember that vaccinations save millions of lives.