

Vaccine Debate Heats Up in Ireland

Parents who claim their children developed autism after getting MMR vaccinations have threatened to withdraw from an investigation by a government health committee into whether children should be vaccinated.

The parents say they will not participate in the inquiry, due to begin tomorrow, if the joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children refuses to call two experts whose research has claimed to link the MMR or three-in-one vaccination for measles, mumps and rubella to autism.

The Oireachtas Committee, which decided to look at the issue of childhood vaccination in response to public concern and poor take-up rates, received more than 80 submissions from parents, the medical profession and health agencies.

The chairman of the committee, Mr Batt O'Keeffe TD, said the committee had decided to first hear from those who made submissions and it would then decide whether to call expert witnesses.

Ms Cecelia Young, the coordinator in the Republic of the Allergy Induced Autism organization, said parents were "very angry" that no decision had been made to call Dr Andrew Wakefield of the Royal Free Hospital, London, or Prof John O'Leary of the Coombe Women's Hospital, Dublin, whose research on a possible link between the vaccination and autism had been published.

Ms Young, the mother of a six-year-old autistic boy from James's Road, Walkinstown, Dublin, said her organization was not anti-vaccines. It wanted children to be vaccinated safely.