NY Times Editorial Supports Vaccines. Now, Do One on Chemicals, GMOs

By Alex Berezow, PhD — January 22, 2019

The New York Times has done something that it very rarely does: It wrote an editorial in support of biotechnology.

The piece, titled "How to Inoculate Against Anti-Vaxxers," is surprisingly good. It correctly stays away from politics, which is smart, since anti-vaxxers can be found on both sides of the aisle. It also offers some helpful tips on how to fight back against anti-vaccine ideology, such as toughening state laws on vaccine exemptions and strategically countering misinformation before it goes viral (no pun intended).

There are only two things wrong with the editorial, one minor, one major.

First, the minor problem. The editorial says, "Vaccine hesitancy is as American as can be." That statement gives the false impression that anti-vaxxers can only be found in America. Unfortunately, anti-vaxxers are found in a number of rich countries, and their influence is increasing throughout Europe. Despite measles ravaging the continent, the French are downright scared of vaccines, with more than 40% of the public believing that vaccines are unsafe. (By comparison, under 15% of Americans share that belief.)

The New York Times Routinely Spreads Misinformation About Chemicals

The second problem with the editorial is much bigger. The NYT has a long history of spreading misinformation about chemicals and GMOs. That seriously undermines its important message about vaccines.

Consider this statement from the editorial: "Yes, there are chemicals in vaccines, but they are not
toxic." That is 100% correct. (The dose makes the poison.) However, the *New York Times* has written dozens of articles claiming the exact opposite, namely, that chemicals are dangerous.

One of the biggest offenders is columnist Nicholas Kristof. He recently wrote an article with the not-so-subtle headline "What Poisons Are in Your Body?" which detailed all the horrifying chemicals in toothpaste, soap, shower curtains, and various other household products. The intention was clear: to scare people. (See below.)

Here are 12 chemicals found in these everyday products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHEMICAL</th>
<th>DETAILS</th>
<th>FOUND IN PRODUCTS LIKE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANTIMICROBIALS</td>
<td>Can interfere with thyroid and other hormones</td>
<td>Colgate Total toothpaste, soap, deodorant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BENZOPHENONES</td>
<td>Can mimic natural hormones like estrogen</td>
<td>Sunscreen, lotions, lip balm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BISPHENOLS</td>
<td>Can mimic natural hormones like estrogen</td>
<td>Protective lining for canned goods, hard plastic water bottles, thermal paper register receipts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,4-DICHLOROBENZENE</td>
<td>Can affect thyroid hormones and may increase risk of cancer</td>
<td>Mothballs, toilet deodorizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARABENS</td>
<td>Can mimic natural hormones like estrogen</td>
<td>Cosmetics, personal care products like shampoos, hair gels, lotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHTHALATES</td>
<td>Can disrupt male reproductive development and fertility</td>
<td>Vinyl shower curtains, fast food, nail polish, perfume/cologne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRAGRANCE CHEMICALS</td>
<td>Can exacerbate asthma symptoms and disrupt natural hormones</td>
<td>Perfume/cologne, cleaning products, dryer sheets, air fresheners</td>
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<tr>
<td>PER- AND POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES (PFAS)</td>
<td>Can affect hormones, immune response in children, and may increase risk of cancer</td>
<td>Scotchgard and other stain-resistant treatments, fast-food wrappers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLAME RETARDANTS</td>
<td>Can affect neurodevelopment and hormone levels, and may increase risk of cancer</td>
<td>Nail polish, foam cushioning in furniture, rigid foam insulation</td>
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Funnily enough, antimicrobials were on Mr. Kristof's list of scary things because they "can interfere with thyroid and other hormones." Do you know where else you can find antimicrobials? Vaccines. Phthalates are another chemical boogeyman because of their alleged endocrine disruptor ability. Yep, they're in vaccines, too. And in 2014, the *New York Times* ran an editorial about the dangers of formaldehyde in household products. You can probably guess where this is going: Some vaccines contain formaldehyde.

As it turns out, the very chemicals that the *New York Times* has been scaring people about for years are also in the vaccines they are now promoting. Some of their loyal readers could get confused.

**The New York Times Editorial Board Is Scientifically Illiterate**

To be crystal clear, we are 100% in favor of vaccination. Our point is that the scientific illiteracy of the *New York Times* is why they can embrace the scientific consensus on vaccines while rejecting the scientific consensus on chemicals and GMOs. Apparently, they don't understand that the basic tenet of toxicology -- "the dose makes the poison" -- is true whether we are discussing vaccines, pesticides, or nail polish.
The NYT editorial in support of vaccines was a good start. Now, they should do one for chemicals and GMOs.


Links