

# It was a mostly good week for vaccines

By ACSH Staff — August 26, 2011

Once again, the alleged link between autism and vaccines has been thoroughly and [publicly denounced](#) <sup>[1]</sup> by an esteemed panel of scientists, this time from the Institute of Medicine (IOM). The comprehensive IOM report is certainly not the first to provide substantial evidence that there is no link between autism and the M.M.R. (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine (or any others). Nonetheless, the scientific community must continually counter vaccine fear-mongering: because of former doctor Andrew Wakefield's now discredited and retracted study of 1998, too many parents avoid having their children vaccinated. Dr. Ellen Wright Clayton, chairwoman of the IOM panel, did her best to allay their fears. The M.M.R. vaccine doesn't cause autism, and the evidence is overwhelming that it doesn't, she said in an interview. As she explained, We looked at more than a thousand peer-reviewed articles, and we didn't see many adverse effects caused by vaccines. That's pretty remarkable.

The IOM study examined more than just the M.M.R. vaccine, though. Its comprehensive final report covered 158 potential adverse events for eight different vaccines, but found only 14 side effects to be convincingly linked to vaccines. Aside from ruling out many lingering vaccine-related concerns, the report can serve as a public resource, says Dr. Clayton. Even in many of the instances where there were insufficient data to draw a conclusion, the committee has provided a detailed explanation of the available evidence. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava observes that many of the side effects associated with such vaccines are so rare that it's hard to get a reasonable sample size. It also remains possible, notes ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross, that there is no evidence in the majority of these cases. You can't prove a negative, he says. Which is why the [New York Times](#) <sup>[1]</sup> [article](#) <sup>[1]</sup> noted that, despite the new report, anti-vaccine fanatics and some parents will remain suspicious. And why not, asks Dr. Ross, when pediatricians such as Drs. Robert Sears and Jay Gordon fan the flames of anti-vaccine hysteria with their unscientific drivel masquerading as science.

**On another vaccine front,** rotavirus vaccine [continues](#) <sup>[2]</sup> to prevent a significant number of children's deaths in Mexico. A letter in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reports that the vaccine, introduced in Mexico in 2007, has resulted in about 50 percent fewer diarrhea-related deaths in children.

Rotavirus-induced diarrhea remains a major cause of disease and death in the less-developed world, especially among infants and children. The positive results of the childhood rotavirus vaccination in Mexico, say the authors, support the World Health Organization's recommendation that all children, worldwide, be immunized against the devastating virus.

**And, after having [recently reported](#)** <sup>[3]</sup> on not only the continuing efficacy but also the recently extended list of cancers that the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine protects against, we were

disheartened to learn that [less than half](#) <sup>[4]</sup> of all girls in the U.S. have been inoculated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's report of the low rate of inoculation a rate that is especially low when compared to the rates for other vaccines has made some experts speculate that parents are uneasy about the sexual issues tied to the HPV vaccine.

This is unfortunate, says Dr. Ross, since the vaccine protects against oral, cervical, and anal cancers, as well as genital warts. He also notes the importance of inoculating boys against HPV: Since HPV is commonly spread sexually, if boys can be protected against it, this will further cut down on the incidence among girls. The HPV vaccines have not yet been approved for cancer prevention in males, but they have been for protection against ano-genital warts.

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[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/26/health/26vaccine.html>

[2] <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/25/news/la-heb-rotavirus-vaccine-mexico-20110824>

[3] [http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.2946/news\\_detail.asp](http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.2946/news_detail.asp)

[4] <http://yourlife.usatoday.com/health/story/2011-08-25/Teen-vaccinations-against-cervical-cancer-lagging/50136112/1>