

### *Talking Points – Thimerosal Legislation*

- **Thimerosal is Safe:** In 2001, an Institute of Medicine (IOM) report found available scientific evidence inadequate to either support or reject a causal relationship between thimerosal and autism. A reevaluation of the issue by the IOM in 2004 found that sufficient data published in the interim clearly favored rejection of such a causal relationship. The Academy has publicly supported those findings.
- **Children under age 3 already receive only trace amounts of thimerosal:** The American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendation in 1999 was that, as a precautionary measure to reduce the exposure to thimerosal-containing vaccines over the first six months of life, thimerosal preservative should be removed from childhood vaccines - in contrast, the influenza vaccine is recommended for children older than 6 months.
- **Risk of increased disease in unprotected populations:** The known serious risk of diseases and death caused by the failure to immunize infants against vaccine-preventable infectious diseases outweighs the unknown and probably smaller risk, if any, from exposure to thimerosal.
- **First Step in restricting vaccines:** This legislation ban could be a first step to ban not only those vaccines which contain thimerosal preservative, but also those vaccines which contain even trace amounts of thimerosal. The state will be unable to utilize several combination vaccines that are currently available to protect its citizens against vaccine-preventable disease if this legislation is enacted.
- **Loss of trust in Vaccines:** Thimerosal found in childhood vaccines causes no adverse health effects, but the suggestion created by this legislation leads the public to believe the contrary. No credible evidence supports this suggestion, but making parents unnecessarily hesitant of vaccinating their children could potentially lower immunization rates, and in turn, jeopardize child health. These bills, at worst, are an effort by vaccination critics to prevent routine childhood vaccination for its own sake - and at best, they will still have that very effect, and will only serve to make the public unnecessarily anxious about the safety of childhood immunizations.
- **Increased Costs:** These bills will raise the cost of vaccines to the state and to health care consumers. At present, preservative-free versions of influenza vaccine are approximately 25% more expensive than the more commercially available preservative-containing vaccine, and an unintended consequence could be that these vaccines will only get more expensive as demand is artificially increased by these bills.
- **Legislation based on emotion not science:** The legislation sets a very bad precedent for making health policy. Lawmakers have an obligation to protect the interests of all of their constituents, not just those of a vocal minority, and to do so with the scientific evidence base informing their decisions. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the safety and efficacy of childhood vaccines - whether they contain thimerosal preservative, have only trace amounts of thimerosal, or are preservative-free. The more time and energy spent on the thimerosal issue - one that has been resolved in the minds of the scientific experts - only detracts from improving child health in areas we know we can achieve success.