

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6300

As of January 31, 2008

Title: An act relating to vaccines.

Brief Description: Regarding mercury-containing vaccines.

Sponsors: Senators Oemig, Rasmussen, Fairley, Regala and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/28/08.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

Background: In 2001 the Institute of Medicine (IOM) convened a committee to review selected issues related to immunization safety. This committee concluded that the evidence was inadequate to either accept or reject a causal relationship between thimerosal (which is a preservative and contains 50 percent mercury by weight) exposure from childhood vaccines and the neurodevelopmental disorders of autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and speech or language delay. The committee did conclude that the hypothesis that exposure to thimerosal-containing vaccines could be associated with neurodevelopmental disorders was biologically plausible. The committee urged that full consideration be given to removing thimerosal from any biological product to which infants, children, and pregnant women are exposed.

Autism is a developmental disorder with no known causes or cures that affects the brain and, depending on the particular severity of the disorder, can cause mild to severe cognitive, social, motor and behavioral problems. Medical experts say it can take many forms, but signs usually emerge after the age of two.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, mercury has been removed from or reduced to trace amounts in all vaccines routinely recommended for children six years of age and younger, with the exception of inactivated influenza vaccine. A preservative-free version of the inactivated influenza vaccine (contains trace amounts of thimerosal) is available in limited supply at this time for use in infants, children, and pregnant women.

Under current Washington law, pregnant women and children under the age of three years cannot be vaccinated with a vaccine that contains more than 0.5 micrograms of mercury per 0.5 milliliter dose. In the event of an outbreak or vaccine shortage, the Secretary of the Department of Health can suspend this requirement.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

A 2004 final report (issued by the IOM committee) examining the hypothesis that vaccines (including thimerosal containing vaccines) are causally associated with autism, rejected the causal relationship between thimerosal-containing vaccines and autism. The FDA continues to monitor this issue and has made efforts to reduce the exposure of infants, children, and pregnant women to mercury from various sources. Many organizations continue to question the findings of government sponsored studies that raise doubts about a link between thimerosal in vaccines and autism. According to the Autism Research Institute, such reports are false. Many scientific studies that demonstrate thimerosal to be harmful and a highly probably causal factor in autism are consistently ignored in the medical establishment's publications.

Summary of Bill: A person cannot receive flu vaccine containing more than .1 microgram of mercury. When anyone is to be vaccinated with a product which contains added mercury or more than .1 microgram of mercury, they must be informed of the total amount of mercury (if receiving multiple vaccinations) and risks associated with mercury exposure. Health care providers are required to provide a vaccine adverse event reporting system (VAERS) form to every person vaccinated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2008.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill is about reducing exposure to mercury, and informing consumers and manufacturers about mercury's effects. Many studies have shown mercury to effect babies and children negatively, even trace amounts are not acceptable. We need to use mercury free vaccines. Mercury has a causal link to autism.

We need to get accurate information to parents so they can make better decisions about having their children vaccinated. There is an epidemic of autism in the U.S. The FDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have been asleep at the switch. No studies have found that thimerosal is safe.

CON: There is no plausible connection between the mercury in vaccines and health effects; it isn't substantiated by science. This will limit public access to flu vaccines. This bill will affect vaccination rates and make flu vaccines difficult to get.

We care about children and don't know the cause of autism. Science tells us there is no causal connection between mercury and autism. Limiting access to vaccines will hurt all of us, including women and children.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Oemig, prime sponsor; Senator Rasmussen; Dr. Andrew Hill Cutler; Diana Stadden, Autism Society of Washington; Christy Diamond, Uninformed Consent.

CON: Edgar K. Marcuse, Children's Hospital; Dr. Maxine Hayes, Washington State Department of Health; Annie Iriye, American College of Ob-Gyn; Jim Alumbaugh; Dr. Diana

Yu, Washington State Board of Health; Cynthia Shurtleff, Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.