Report to the Boards of Health

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Recent CDC Website Change About Vaccines and Autism

On the instruction of the Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the CDC recently changed their website about vaccines and autism. The page used to say, “no links have been found between any vaccine ingredients and autism spectrum disorder (ASD)" and "vaccines do not cause autism.” It now states, “the claim "vaccines do not cause autism" is not an evidence-based claim because studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism.” The statement “vaccines do not cause autism” is still present on the page but is followed by an asterisk (*) to a footnote saying the header "vaccines do not cause autism" has not been removed due to an agreement with the chair of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee that it would remain on the CDC website.

The website says the change in wording was made to follow the Data Quality Act, also known as the Information Quality Act (IQA). This act (passed in 2001) required guidelines to ensure “quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity” of information shared by federal agencies. The guidelines state that agencies are to put guidelines into their practices. The CDC had already developed information quality guidelines, and they use peer review as encouraged by the IQA to ensure the highest quality scientific information. The CDC have details listed on their Information Quality Support website. Since the information that had been on the Vaccines and Autism page followed the information quality guidelines, no change was needed.

The Health and Human Services Secretary felt that saying "vaccines do not cause autism" as a definitive fact went beyond what could technically be proven by science. Hundreds of studies have been done in many different ways in multiples different countries by different researchers. These studies looked at millions of children and different types of vaccines, vaccine ingredients, and vaccine schedules. The data from all of these studies have found no relationship between vaccines and autism. This has been considered definitive enough for scientists and doctors to say that vaccines do not cause autism.

Larger Issues

Raising unbased doubt about the potential causes of autism distracts time and resources away from the real advances against ASD. This also adds more confusion and distrust for vaccines which already struggle with hesitancy and declining rates. Allowing the CDC to change its messaging without any checks or balances has now made all its messaging suspect and untrustworthy.

Recommendations:

1. Discuss the importance of supporting science with your elected officials.
2. For the time being, the CDC website may not be evidence-based and need to be approached with caution or avoided.
3. Consider other trustworthy sources, such as:
    a. The American Academy of Pediatrics https://www.aap.org/ and https://www.healthychildren.org/
    b. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists https://www.acog.org/
    c. American Academy of Family Physicians https://www.aafp.org/
    d. https://www.vaccineinformation.org/
    e. https://www.vaccinesafety.edu/

Resources:

- Autism Science Foundation. Autism and Vaccines: Read the Science https://autismsciencefoundation.org/autism-and-vaccines-read-the-science/
- Statement from Leading Medical, Health and Patient Advocacy Groups on CDC Autism Website Changes https://www.acponline.org/sites/default/files/acp-policy-library/statements/joint_statement_on_cdc_website_changes_vaccines_autism_2025.pdf

References

- CDC. Autism and Vaccines. https://www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/about/autism.html
- Federal Administrative Procedure Sourcebook. Information Quality Act. https://sourcebook.acus.gov/wiki/Information_Quality_Act
- OMB, U. (2002). Guidelines for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies. Federal Register, 67(36), 8451-8460.
- CDC. Information Quality Support. https://www.cdc.gov/science-quality/php/information-quality-support/index.html