

Why Anti-thimerosal Vaccine Legislation in Hawaii is Dangerous to Health

1. It would perpetuate false and misleading information that vaccines are not safe.

Parents may see the banning of thimerosal as an admission that vaccine safety oversight is inadequate. If thimerosal is banned, parents will doubt the safety of vaccines in general, immunization rates would fall, and rates of vaccine-preventable diseases (e.g., measles, whooping cough, and Hib bacterial meningitis) would rise. Many parents may also unknowingly choose to reject vaccines that have never contained thimerosal because they don't understand the issues. In addition, while there is a provision to allow the department of health to grant an exemption to the law if vaccine were in short supply, it would also require that the patient be informed that the vaccine they (or their child) were to receive contains mercury. Again, this implies a false impression that there is some danger inherent in the vaccine.

2. It would add more complexity to the current vaccine delivery system.

The number of vaccines given to infants and children has increased from 7 in 1985 to 10 in 1995 and to 14 in 2006. With new vaccines being introduced, changes in scheduling, and all of the other complexities of vaccination delivery, it is already difficult for providers to stay current with the ever-changing nature of immunization. Adding a requirement that providers may use only influenza vaccines in either reduced thimerosal or thimerosal-free formulations would add more complexity.

3. It could result in children going unvaccinated because current U.S. manufacturing capacity cannot produce enough thimerosal-free vaccine each year to vaccinate all children.

The pediatric influenza deaths during the 2003-04 season are a sharp reminder of the danger that vaccine-preventable diseases still pose to children and of the need to ensure every child is vaccinated. The one manufacturer that produces thimerosal-free influenza vaccine is moving to expand manufacturing capacity. Passing state laws outlawing

thimerosal will not make manufacturing capacity increase faster; it will just mean that vaccine may not be available to vaccinate children in anti-thimerosal states.

4. It would limit the nation's ability to quickly administer influenza vaccine to everyone in the U.S. when a pandemic strikes.

When the next influenza pandemic occurs, whether it is the Avian/H5N1 influenza that is now in Asia or another influenza virus, it is vaccine packed in *multidose vials* that will protect Americans. Thimerosal-free vaccine can be packaged only in single-dose units, and we are far short of the capacity necessary to fill enough single-dose units for all in the nation. Single-dose presentations also waste vaccine—a given volume of vaccine packaged in a multidose vial, will vaccinate more people than if packaged in single-dose units.

6. It would be a more costly alternative to taxpayers.

Influenza vaccine without thimerosal is, on average, 25-30% higher, than are products containing thimerosal as a preservative or in trace amounts. Thus, for every 100,000 persons enrolled in the state's Medicaid program who are vaccinated for influenza, the state will pay an additional \$265,000–\$330,000 for thimerosal-free or thimerosal-reduced vaccine. Using scarce resources to buy thimerosal-free vaccines would also impede the state's ability to purchase other critical vaccines.

7. Contrary to the claims of the proponents of anti-thimerosal vaccine legislation, no evidence exists that associates thimerosal-containing vaccines with the development of autism and other neurologic disorders.

The issue of mercury's ill effects on the neurologic development of infants is based on studies of methylmercury. Nearly all methylmercury exposures in the U.S. occur through eating fish and shellfish. Several large scientific studies have shown no evidence between autism and the ethylmercury-containing thimerosal in vaccines. This has been confirmed by many major professional medical and public health organizations and affirmed by the independent Institute of Medicine.

Influenza vaccines save lives! Don't allow the Hawaii legislature to deny access to them — support their availability to every person in the state.