

## New California stats: autism epidemic worsening

Autism advocate Rick Rollens, who has successfully spearheaded efforts to fund research into spiraling autism rates in California, reports new statistics showing that "the number of new children entering California's developmental services system is continuing to increase at an alarming rate."

Rollens reports that new figures from the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) show that over a 90-day period, 566 children with autism entered the system. "It should be noted that in 1994, there were 667 new cases for the entire year," Rollens says.

Moreover, Rollens notes, "Since the autism epidemic began, the percentage of overall caseload growth for autism in the California system has increased from a steady 3 percent of the total caseload, which also includes mental retardation, cerebral palsy, and epilepsy, to the current 30 to 34 percent of the caseload. [This is] an astonishing 1,000 percent-plus increase over a 20-year period."

Rollens notes that over the 25-year period from DDS's inception in 1969 to 1994, the number of autistic individuals in the DDS system grew to 5,100. It took only five years, from 1994 to 1999, however, for another 5,100 autistic individuals to be added to the rolls. And it is estimated that the number of autistic clients added to the DDS caseload in 1999, 2000, and the first half of 2001—that is, over the last 2-1/2 years—will equal or exceed 5,100.

Rollens adds that the California figures include only "classical" cases of autism—not individuals with pervasive developmental disorder, Asperger syndrome, or other problems that do not meet the full criteria for autism. He also emphasizes that the newly identified children are under the age of ten,

and not merely older individuals who were misdiagnosed in the past.

The new figures from California are consistent with recent figures from the UK (see ARRI 14/4) showing that 58 of every 10,000 school-aged children has autism—a more than ten-fold increase over the previously accepted figure of 5 in 10,000.

### First vaccine-injury lawsuit filed

The first of many class-action and individual lawsuits claiming autism to be vaccine-caused has been filed by the Dallas-based law firm Waters and Kraus. The suit alleges that the injury was the result of the high level of mercury administered in vaccines. Mercury is contained in the preservative thimerosal, which is used in more than 30 vaccines given to infants and children.

Waters and Kraus will be working with a number of other law firms nationwide. Potential claimants should call Claire Bothwell at Waters and Kraus, toll free, 1-866-VAXSLA (bothwell@awpk.com).

## New Wakefield study: Distinct form of colitis detected in autism

(continued from page 1)

tween celiac disease itself and a variety of neurologic abnormalities including autism," they say, "suggest there may be a group of atypical autoimmune conditions in which the intestine and the brain are linked."

Reviewing the paper, William Balistreri comments that the new findings are consistent with the theory that in some cases gut dysfunction leads to altered intestinal permeability, allowing mind-altering chemicals normally contained within the digestive tract to affect the central nervous system. "It follows," Balistreri says, "that treatment of the gut disease may affect the CNS disease."

"Colonic CD8 and  $\alpha\alpha$  T-cell infiltration with epithelial damage in children with autism," Raoul I. Furlano, Andrew Anthony, Richard Day, Angela Brown, Louise McGarvey, Michael A. Thomson, Susan E. Davies, Mark Berelowitz, Alastair Forbes, Andrew J. Wakefield, John A. Walker-Smith, and Simon H. Murch, *Journal of Pediatrics*, Vol. 138, No. 3, March 2001, pp. 366-372. Address: Simon Murch, University Department of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Royal Free and University College Medical School, Royal Free Campus, Rowland Hill St., London, NW3 2PF, UK.

## Purine metabolism defects again targeted as autism cause

A recent study adds to evidence that abnormalities in purine metabolism may play a role in many cases of autism.

Adenosine deaminase (ADA) is an enzyme involved in the metabolism of purines, which are natural substances critical to the synthesis of DNA and RNA and a number of other cellular activities. A. M. Persico and colleagues studied the prevalence of two genes, ADA1 and ADA2, which code for variants of ADA, in 91 autistic and 152 non-disabled subjects. The researchers note that individuals carrying one copy of the ADA2 allele exhibit lower catalytic activity compared

continued on page 7

## MMR/autism link NOT disproven

The news media have widely overstated the findings of two investigations of the link between the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccination and autism. Both studies, one by Kaye et al. in the *British Medical Journal*, and the other by Dales et al. in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, used gross statistical analysis to (they claim) determine if the increase in the prevalence of autism could be caused by the MMR vaccine. While the media reports state that the researchers concluded that the MMR could not be the cause of the autism increase, the researchers themselves, aware of the weakness of their methods, cautiously refrained from drawing that conclusion.

Kaye et al. say "...The data provide evidence that no correlation exists..." and "The explanation for the marked increase... remains uncertain." ("Providing evidence" is not the same as "proving.")

Dales et al. are equally diffident: "These data do not suggest an association between MMR immunization... and an increase in autism occurrence."

These "conclusions" are very weak, bearing as they do on the hypothesis that the MMR shot is the sole cause of autism. They did not test the much more plausible hypothesis that the MMR was one of the "straws that broke the camel's back," impinging as it did upon an immune system already overtaxed by numerous mercury-containing vaccines.

The evidence for this latter hypothesis, including blind laboratory DNA studies by independent laboratories, was well known but not mentioned in the reports, which is why the authors of the two studies waffled so much in drawing their conclusions. The controversy is a very long way from being resolved, and a number of class-action lawsuits are being initiated in this country, as in the U.K., to help give the matter a fair hearing in a court of law.

The studies employ the old courtroom trick of overstating the value of flimsy evidence while ignoring much more significant opposing evidence—exactly what Johnny Cochran did when he said, "If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit."

—BR