

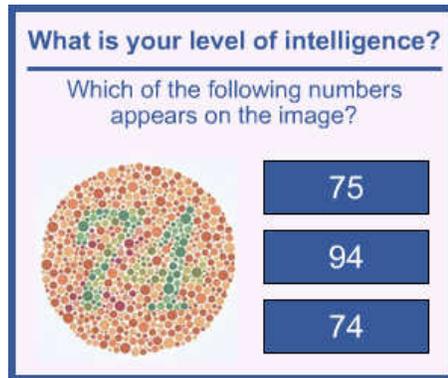

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Study Linking Vaccine to Autism Was 'Elaborate Fraud,' Journal Says

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The first study to link a childhood vaccine to autism was based on doctored information about the children involved, according to a new report on the widely discredited research.

The conclusions of the 1998 paper by Andrew Wakefield and colleagues was renounced by 10 of its 13 authors and later retracted by the medical journal Lancet, where it was published. Still, the suggestion the MMR shot was connected to autism spooked parents worldwide and immunization rates for measles, mumps and rubella have never fully recovered.



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A new examination found, by comparing the reported diagnoses in the paper to hospital records, that Wakefield and colleagues altered facts about patients in their study.

The analysis, by British journalist Brian Deer, found that despite the claim in Wakefield's paper that the 12 children studied were normal until they had the MMR shot, five had previously documented developmental problems. Deer also found that all the cases were somehow misrepresented when he compared data from medical records and the children's parents.

Wakefield could not be reached for comment despite repeated calls and requests to the publisher of his recent book, which claims there is a connection between vaccines and autism that has been ignored by the medical establishment. Wakefield now lives in the U.S. where he enjoys a vocal following including celebrity supporters like Jenny McCarthy.

Deer's article was paid for by the Sunday Times of London and Britain's Channel 4 television network. It was published online Thursday in the medical journal, BMJ.

In an accompanying editorial, BMJ editor Fiona Godlee and colleagues called Wakefield's study "an elaborate fraud." They said Wakefield's work in other journals should be examined to see if it should be retracted.

Last May, Wakefield was stripped of his right to practice medicine in Britain. Many other published studies have shown no connection between the MMR vaccination and autism.

But measles has surged since Wakefield's paper was published and there are sporadic outbreaks in Europe and the U.S. In 2008, measles was deemed endemic in England and Wales.

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