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Timeline: MMR controversy

The triple inoculation for measles, mumps and rubella has been dividing opinion for more than a decade

Staff and agencies
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February 1998

The gastroenterologist Dr Andrew Wakefield, then of London's Royal Free hospital, suggests a link between the MMR vaccine and an increased risk of autism and bowel disorders. He says his team have found a "genuinely new syndrome" and suggest the combination might be overpowering the body's immune system.

March 1998

The [Medical Research](#) Council says there is no evidence showing a link between the MMR jab and bowel disease or autism.

April 1998

Finnish scientists find no danger associated with the MMR vaccine, after a 14-year study.

April 2000

Wakefield and the pathologist Prof John O'Leary, of Coombe Women's hospital in Dublin, present research to the US Congress. Their study shows that tests on 25 [children](#) with autism reveal 24 had traces of the measles virus in their gut. The Department of Health says the findings prove nothing.

February 2001

A study by the British Medical Journal finds that autism has continued to rise despite MMR administration being static.

December 2001

A review of previous research, conducted by the MRC, finds no link between the vaccine and autistic spectrum disorders.

February 2002

Wakefield and O'Leary publish a paper in the journal *Molecular Pathology*, that suggests a link between the measles virus and bowel disease in children with developmental disorders.

March 2005

Japanese scientists say the MMR vaccination is unlikely to be linked to an increase in autism after they find a rise in the condition following the withdrawal of the MMR jab in that country in 1993.

May 2006

US scientists report they have found the measles virus in the guts of autistic children with bowel disease.

The research leader, Dr Stephen Walker, adds that the finding does not show that the MMR vaccine caused the condition.

February 2008

A team from London's Guy's and St Thomas's hospitals study the immune responses from the MMR jab in 240 children, and find no evidence to link it to autism.

November 2008

The Health Protection Agency warns of a measles "epidemic" after cases of the disease exceed 1,000 for the first time in a decade. The agency reports 1,049 confirmed cases in England and Wales during the first 10 months of this year, the highest total since 1995. Dr Mary Ramsay, an immunisation expert at the agency, puts the problem down to "relatively low uptake" of the triple vaccine. She adds there is now a "real risk of a large measles epidemic".