

Measles Vaccine Still Doesn't Cause Autism

A massive study of 95,000 children finds no link between MMR vaccines and autism spectrum disorders

It seems silly that this is still an argument. Major [public health organizations](#), courts all the way up to the [Federal Circuit](#), and even the [journal that published the fraudulent paper](#) that initially set off the MMR vaccine scare—they all agree that vaccines do not cause autism.

But a [new paper published in JAMA](#) *should* end debate once and for all.

In a study of 95,000 children, researchers were unable to find any association between the measles, mumps rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism. The researchers also examined whether each child had a family history of autism; even for children within this high-risk category, they found no association between MMR and autism.

Not that we needed this study to prove it—there has never been a single high-quality scientific paper to suggest a connection between vaccines and autism. Yet, over the past 15 years, [numerous studies](#) have examined vaccines and their ingredients, and consistently found them safe and effective.

But just in case you were unable to hear the past decade of solid science over Jenny McCarthy's shrieks, we'll recap. Back in 2004 the Institute of Medicine [examined a large body of epidemiological evidence](#) and confirmed that the MMR vaccine did not cause autism. In 2011, the same group [reviewed another eight major vaccines](#) and found, once again, that vaccines don't cause autism. Two years later, the CDC [tracked 256 children with autism](#) and investigated whether they had received the MMR vaccine—no connection. And we stopped even counting pro-thimerosal papers after [nine studies from several countries](#) proved that the mercury-containing chemical was entirely safe.

If there weren't lives at risk, it wouldn't matter that all of these studies dispel the vaccine-autism link. But now that [epidemiologists are nearly certain the Disneyland Measles Outbreak](#) was caused by unvaccinated children, it's really time to stop humoring parents who opt out because the research isn't in yet. Here's your research: 95,000 children, two decades of science.

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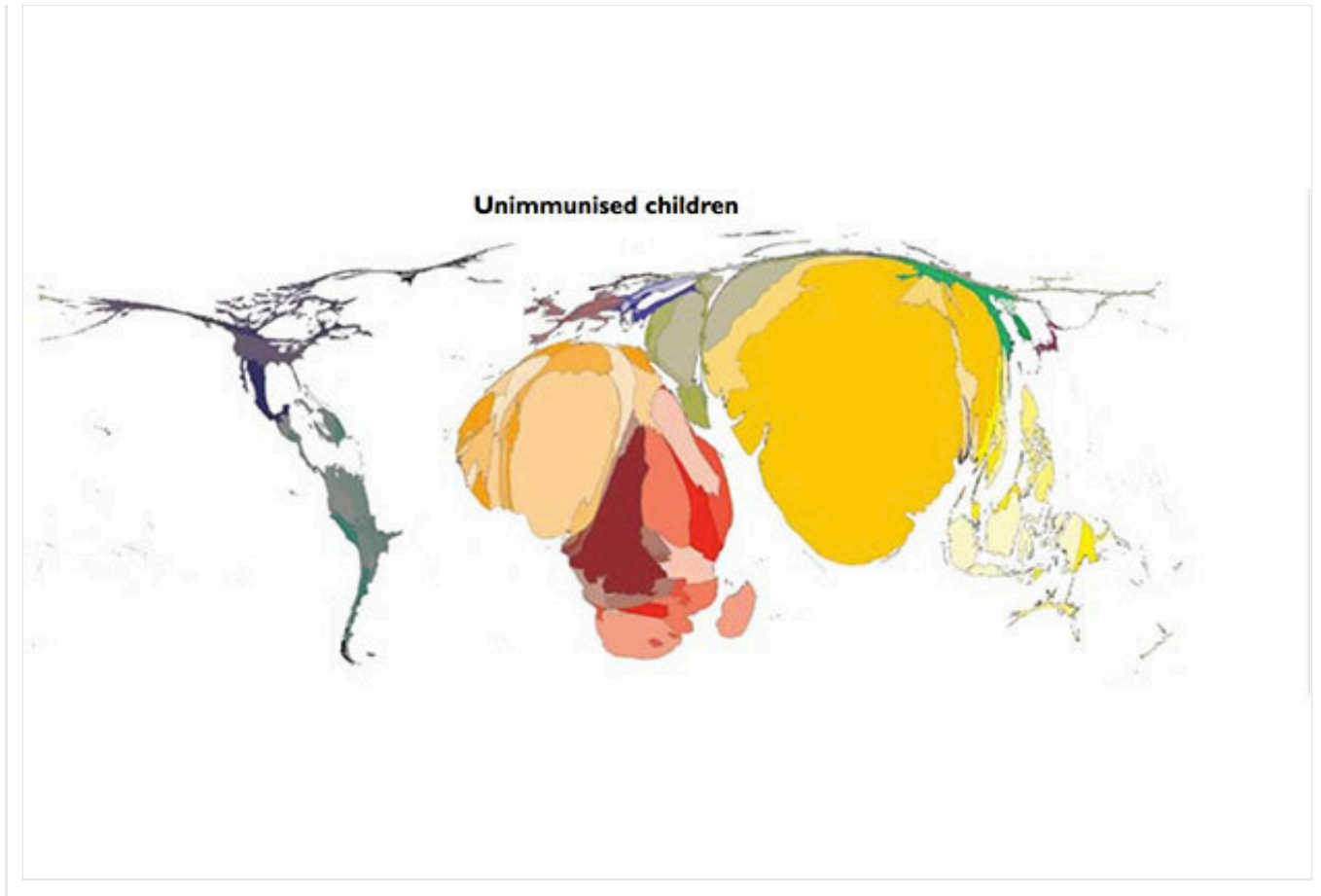
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These Maps Show The Link Between Child Mortality And Unvaccinated Kids

Americans have ready access to vaccines, but some people don't believe in them, as the current raging debate makes clear. In many other parts of the world, though, there is no debate—because the vaccines aren't available.

And the link between child mortality and a lack of immunizations is strong. See the two maps below, from [Save the Children](#), a nonprofit that raises money for child-focused causes. The first illustrates mortality rates for children under the age of 5—the bigger the country in the map, the higher the mortality rates. The second illustrates the number of unvaccinated children in each country—again, the higher the number, the larger the size of the country.





About 70 percent of unvaccinated kids in the world live in 10 countries, with a staggering 52 percent concentrated in three: India (yellow), Nigeria (peach) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (maroon). You can see that these three countries also have very high rates of child mortality. Conversely, you can see that the U.S. is minuscule in both maps because we have such high rates of vaccination for children and incredibly low child mortality rates.

H/T: [Save The Children](#).

The CDC just announced one in 59 children are autistic. Here's why that's not evidence of an epidemic.

Especially within minority groups, parents and doctors are getting better at identifying the condition.

[Ari Ne'eman](#) Apr 30, 2018, 8:21am EDT

A father with his seven-year-old autistic son.

Joe Amon/The Denver Post/Getty Images

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week **released the latest autism prevalence numbers**, which suggest that approximately one in 59 children are autistic.

This represents an increase from the CDC's previous estimate, released in 2014, of one in 68. And it's a truly remarkable increase over the 2007 estimate, which reported that one in 150 children — the periodic study focuses on 8-year-olds — were autistic.

As the release date for the new CDC numbers approached, conspiracy theorist Alex Jones **blasted** policymakers for “denying and refusing to tackle our nation's staggering autism epidemic.” But such views were not hard to find echoed on social media, even from figures within the autism world:

I mean how stupid does the [@CDC](#) think people are? 1 in 59 American kids suddenly have autism and it is not environmental

<https://twitter.com/PaulWhiteleyPhD/status/989604079931445253...>

— katie wright (@katiewr31413491) [5:03 PM - Apr 26, 2018](#)

It's at epidemic proportions! Support your local autism agency or

<http://AutismDelaware.org>.

[https://twitter.com/USATODAY/status/989585110684102656 ...](https://twitter.com/USATODAY/status/989585110684102656)

— Drive for Autism (@Drive4Autism) [7:55 PM - Apr 26, 2018](#)

There is no autism epidemic, however. The numbers are likely changing due to improved diagnosis and services, more inclusive diagnostic criteria and reduced stigma rather than a change in the actual number of autistic people.

They should absolutely not be used to give credence to discredited theories that, for instance, vaccines cause autism.

What the numbers really show us

These findings are consistent with what previous research has told us — that autism likely exists in 1 to 3 percent of the general population. These studies have shown a consistent range of autism prevalence across different populations, researchers, and countries. Conducted both [in the United States](#) and in [other developed countries](#), this research has found that there exists a large undiagnosed autistic population, particularly among older adults (who grew up before the modern understanding of autism), and among underserved groups.

“I am glad the CDC’s autism prevalence rates are becoming more realistic,” said Shannon Rosa, editor of the [Thinking Person’s Guide to Autism](#), a popular publication among both autistic adults and family members, “I hope wider understanding of what this data adjustment means will lead to more autism acceptance, as well as better autism services.”

Unfortunately, not everyone was so measured in their response. Talk About Curing Autism, an organization affiliated with the anti-vaccine movement, [announced](#) after the CDC report that “a prevalence rate of 1 in 59 cannot be

ignored. Families are counting on us to act and support as we can no longer ignore this epidemic.”

The idea that autism represents a recent and unprecedented phenomenon is an article of faith among those parents who continue to believe that autism is caused by vaccines, despite a wealth of scientific evidence debunking the idea. Just as science has debunked the vaccine causation hypothesis, it also casts strong doubt that any autism “epidemic” exists.

Grasping that the numbers represent better identification of a population that has always existed should lead to important policy shifts. Rather than searching for the cause of a nonexistent surge in the condition, we can focus on the needs of autistic people as a population long misidentified, or not identified at all.

Many autistic adults have gone through life without knowing why they are different, a deeply stressful experience. After decades of social isolation, underemployment or unemployment, and even homelessness, receiving a diagnosis that explains how your brain works can be truly liberating.

And if the rate of autism has long been stable, policymakers and funders should rethink the public response to autism. If rates are increasing, it follows that there are fewer autistic adults relative to autistic children; if rates are *not* increasing, then adults are underdiagnosed. It’s the latter that’s likely to be true. Yet only about 2 percent of autism research funding goes toward the needs of adults.

A brief glance at Talk About Curing Autism’s [sponsor list](#) shows a dizzying array of companies hoping to sell pseudoscientific “treatments” geared at “recovery” from autism. Those hawking such treatments depend on frightening parents into believing that their child has fallen victim to a terrifying new condition.

Autistic people have long criticized the heavy emphasis on trying to make us

look and act like non-autistic people. The search for a “cure” or “recovery” has been profoundly harmful, often justifying abusive interventions. Even today, many autistic children are taught from a young age that hand-flapping, lack of eye contact, or rocking — perfectly natural and normal mannerisms for autistic children — are inherently wrong.

A much sounder view is reflected in a statement on the new CDC numbers by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (full disclosure: I co-founded that organization and ran it for 10 years, and currently serve on its board of directors) “Autism is not a bad thing, and autistic people — of all ages, races, and genders — have always been here ... our data is beginning to catch up to that fact.”

Recognizing that autism prevalence has largely remained stable, even as our understanding of it has changed, means we can trade the urgency of a false public health crisis for the urgency of meeting the unmet needs of autistic people of all ages.

Evidence abounds that it’s all about better diagnosis

Analyzed properly, the CDC’s report includes some good news. For one thing, autism prevalence rates are rising in part because racial disparities in access to accurate diagnosis are closing.

In earlier CDC reports, white children were 20 to 30 percent more likely than black children to receive an autism diagnosis, and about 50 percent more likely than Hispanic children to receive a diagnosis. Now those gaps stand at 7 percent and 22 percent. More work remains to be done, but [CDC’s data](#) suggests that much of the increase is due to closing these diagnostic disparities. (There’s no reason to think there are racial or ethnic differences in autism rates.)

Research also suggests that nonwhite children are diagnosed at later ages than white children. (There’s a telling inconsistency in racial disparities in

diagnoses. Children of color are often overdiagnosed with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance — and then removed from general education.)

Similarly, we know that there are significant diagnostic disparities by gender. These gaps were also narrowed in the new CDC report, though not by as much as race. The agency's most recent prior report (in 2014) identified 4.5 autistic boys for every one autistic girl; that ratio narrowed to 4 to 1 in the new report. While some experts continue to believe that there are significantly fewer autistic girls than boys, a [**growing amount of evidence**](#) is showing that we continue to severely underdiagnose autistic women and girls.

Prevalence estimates also varied tremendously on the basis of geography, with New Jersey having the highest estimates and Arkansas the lowest. This too should not surprise us — the difference in New Jersey and Arkansas's infrastructure for diagnosis and service provision is significant.

The CDC's new prevalence numbers should not be used for scaremongering. Rather, they provide valuable information on the need to better address diagnostic and service disparities among autistic children — by race and ethnicity, by gender, and by region. And by age: The CDC currently only studies autism prevalence in 8-year-olds but has yet to act on calls to study prevalence in adults too.

When [**the Autism CARES Act**](#) comes up for reauthorization in Congress next year, it will provide an excellent opportunity to recalibrate resources to meet these priorities.

Meanwhile, the money spent by outside groups spreading alarmist concerns about an “autism epidemic” would be better spent on improving services for and protecting the rights of autistic people.

We've always been here. The time has come to pay attention to what we have to say.

Ari Ne'eman is chief executive officer of MySupport.com, an online platform helping people with disabilities and seniors connect to workers. Before that, he co-founded the Autistic Self Advocacy Network and ran the organization from 2006 to 2016. From 2010 to 2015, he served as one of President Barack Obama's appointees to the National Council on Disability. He is currently writing a book on the history of disability in America.

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Rubella's elimination from Australia 'shows vaccinations work'

'The medical experts' advice is absolute – vaccinations save lives,' Greg Hunt says

[Melissa Davey](#) Tue 30 Oct 2018 20.10 EDT

The elimination of rubella is a great day for public health in Australia and sends a powerful message that vaccinations work, the health minister, [Greg Hunt](#), has said.

Rubella, a highly contagious viral disease that can result in miscarriage, stillbirth and birth defects has been eliminated across the country, the [World Health Organization](#) announced on Wednesday.

The illness – also known as German measles – causes a fever, rash, joint pain and swollen lymph glands. If contracted by pregnant women during the first 10 weeks of pregnancy it can result in miscarriage or stillbirth or cause life-long medical issues for their babies.

Hunt said Australia's national immunisation program had been essential in eliminating the disease. The program provides free vaccination for protection against rubella for children aged 12 months, with a booster given at 18 months. Nationwide immunisation rates for five-year-olds is now 94.62%, the highest figure on record.

"The science is in and the medical experts' advice is absolute – vaccinations save lives and protect lives and they are an essential part of a healthy society," Hunt said.

Australia has had rolling epidemics of rubella: the largest number of cases

were reported in 1958, with more than 5,000 notified cases; in 1963-64, with more than 3,000 notified cases; and in the early 1990s, with more than 4,000 notified cases.

More than 30 countries have now eliminated rubella, with “eliminated” status declared once there has been no endemic transmission for at least 36 months. Sweden, Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Montenegro and Uzbekistan are among those countries to have already reached elimination status.

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Anti-vaccine community behind North Carolina chickenpox outbreak



Getty Images

The chickenpox vaccine has seen thousands of US children avoid going to hospital in the last decade

A North Carolina school with a large anti-vaccine community is at the heart of the state's largest chickenpox outbreak in decades, officials say.

On Friday 36 students at Asheville Waldorf School were diagnosed with the disease, the Asheville Citizen-Times newspaper reported.

The school has one of the state's highest rates of religious exemption, allowing students to skip vaccination.

US health officials say vaccinating is far safer than getting chickenpox.

"This is the biggest chickenpox outbreak state health officials are aware of since the vaccine became available," a North Carolina Department of Health spokesman told the BBC in an emailed statement.

Out of the Waldorf School's 152 students, 110 have not received the vaccine for the varicella virus, known to most as chickenpox, [the Citizen-Times found](#).

And 67.9% of the school's kindergarten students had religious immunisation exemptions on file in the 2017-2018 school year, [according to state data](#).

The primary school is fully co-operating with local health officials and is compliant with all North Carolina laws, a spokesperson for the school told the BBC.

"We find that our parents are highly motivated to choose exactly what they want for their children. We, as a school, do not discriminate based on a child's medical history or medical condition."

- [Russia trolls 'spreading vaccine discord'](#)
- [Anti-vaccine views wrong - chief doctor](#)
- [Measles outbreak at Disney raises vaccination questions](#)

Buncombe County, home to the city of Asheville, with a population of over 250,000, has the highest rate of religious-based immunisation exemptions in the state.

Local health officials are closely monitoring the situation, according to the county's health department.

"We want to be clear: vaccination is the best protection from chickenpox," County Medical Director Dr Jennifer Mullendore [said in a statement](#).

"When we see high numbers of unimmunised children and adults, we know that an illness like chickenpox can spread easily throughout the community-into our playgrounds, grocery stores, and sports teams."

North Carolina law requires certain immunisations, including chickenpox, measles and mumps for kindergarteners, but [the state allows for medical and religious exemptions](#).

Most religions do not prohibit vaccination, but in recent years, some US parents have become fearful of adverse reactions to vaccines.

While some bad reactions, like allergies, to vaccines are possible, the medical community has debunked the vast majority of these fears, and groups including the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics encourage vaccination.



How serious is chickenpox?

[Chickenpox](#) is a viral infection that causes a blister-like rash, itching, and fever. In serious cases, it can lead to complications like inflammation of the brain, pneumonia and death.

The virus spreads through contact or coughing and sneezing, though it is not as contagious as measles, which can be spread without any contact.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends vaccinating children between one and 12 years of age. Though serious cases are uncommon, the CDC says chickenpox spreads easily and can be deadly.

The chickenpox vaccine was licensed in the US in 1995. According to the CDC, the vaccine has prevented 3.5 million cases of varicella, 9,000 hospitalisations and 100 deaths annually in the US.

And though some individuals may still get chickenpox with the vaccine, it is very effective at preventing severe or life-threatening cases.

Vaccinating also helps protect susceptible [individuals who are unable to get the vaccine](#), like pregnant women, infants younger than one-year-old and cancer patients.

In the UK, [the chickenpox vaccine is listed as an optional](#) childhood vaccine.