

Q&A

Jenny McCarthy on Autism and Vaccines

By Jeffrey Kluger | Wednesday, Apr. 01, 2009

Like 443

Twitter

Share

Read Later

There was not much in Jenny McCarthy's early career as a *Playboy* model and MTV star to suggest that she would become a passionate advocate for family issues, children's health and autism awareness. But the birth of her now almost 7-year-old son Evan, who developed autism early in life, changed all of that. McCarthy has become a best-selling author, first of lighter stuff like *Baby Laughs* and *Life Laughs*; then of more serious fare, like *Louder than Words: A Mother's Journey in Healing Autism*. (Read "Fragile X: Unraveling Autism's Secrets.")



Fraser Harrison / Getty

Jenny McCarthy

Now, she is releasing her fifth book — co-authored with autism specialist Dr. Jerry Kartzinell, titled *Healing and Preventing Autism*. The book is awfully smart when it comes to hardheaded advice for families trying to heal — or at least draw out — an autistic child. But McCarthy goes soft when she starts exploring the causes of autism, making the usual charges against the usual suspects, including nutrition, environmental toxins and, as always, vaccines. McCarthy and TIME science editor Jeffrey Kluger sparred over the causes of autism and the safety of vaccines. (See the year in medicine 2008.)

Your book points out that autism rates between 1983 and 2008 have climbed in lockstep with vaccination rates, yet childhood obesity, diabetes and even cell-phone use have soared since then, too. Why do you find causation in one and not the others?

I'm not saying it's only the vaccines. But children are given so many shots from the moment they're born. They get multiple injections all at once, and if they fall behind, doctors put them on a catch-up schedule. Babies get the hepatitis B vaccine immediately after they're born and the only way for a newborn to contract that disease is if the mother is a carrier. Why not just screen the mother? Evan was handed to me pre-vaccinated with a Band-Aid on his foot.

Most people who blame autism on vaccines point to the mercury in the shots, yet mercury has been removed from most vaccines and autism rates continue to climb.

We don't believe it's only the mercury. Aluminum and other toxins also play a role. The viruses in the vaccines themselves can be causing it, too.

Your collaborator recommends that parents accept only the haemophilus influenzae type B (HIB) and tetanus vaccine for newborns and then think about the rest. Not polio? What about the polio clusters in unvaccinated communities like the Amish in the U.S.? What about the 2004 outbreak that swept across Africa and Southeast Asia after a single province in northern Nigeria banned vaccines?

I do believe sadly it's going to take some diseases coming back to realize that we need to change and develop vaccines that are safe. If the vaccine companies are not listening to us, it's their fault that the diseases are coming back. They're making a product that's s_____. If you give us a safe vaccine, we'll use it. It shouldn't be polio versus autism. (Read "New Clues to Autism's Cause.")

RELATED

Six Tips for Traveling with an Autistic Child

Inside a School for Autistic Children

Email Print

+ Share Reprints

Follow @TIME

A nationally known magazine's article found via Google