

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5305

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 28, 2005

Title: An act relating to the use of mercury-containing vaccines.

Brief Description: Prohibiting vaccinating pregnant women and children with mercury-containing vaccines.

Sponsors: Senators Rasmussen, Benton, Roach, Swecker, Zarelli, Regala, Stevens, Shin, Delvin, Franklin and Mulliken.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/31/05, 2/28/05 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5305 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Keiser, Chair; Brandland, Franklin, Kline, Parlette and Poulsen.

Staff: Stephanie Yurcisin (786-7438)

Background: There is concern that the mercury-containing stabilizing agents in certain vaccinations typically administered during childhood may cause autism.

Thimerosal, a preservative that has been used in some vaccines since the 1930's to prevent contamination, contains approximately 40 percent ethylmercury. Until 1999, vaccines given to infants to protect them against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (also known as whooping cough), Haemophilus influenzae type b (bacterial meningitis), and Hepatitis B contained thimerosal as a preservative. Today, with the exception of some flu vaccines, none of the vaccines used in the United States to protect preschool aged children against 12 infectious diseases contains thimerosal as a preservative.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Beginning July 1, 2006, it is prohibited to administer a mercury-containing vaccine or inject another mercury-containing product that does not meet existing federal guidelines to a person who is known to be pregnant or who is under three years of age.

The Secretary of Health may suspend this requirement upon the declaration of a public health emergency.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill removes the numerical limits on mercury in vaccines that were contained in the original bill and replaces them with the federal guidelines as a standard. The differing requirements for flu vaccines compared to other vaccines are removed. The substitute bill also inserts an emergency provision.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: There are personal examples of children who were diagnosed with autism shortly after receiving vaccinations. Other states have proposed similar legislation and Washington State should follow. Public health agencies are failing to act and refusing to admit mistakes so the state must step in to prevent unscrupulous vaccine-dumping by pharmaceutical companies. Mercury is toxic and should not be administered to any children or people who are pregnant.

Testimony Against: No scientific evidence exists to back the claims linking vaccines and autism. If you mandate mercury-free vaccines, the available supply will be reduced by one third. Thimerosal contains a different kind of mercury than the one regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency. Even if this is enacted for children, pregnant people should be able to weigh the risks versus the benefits for themselves and should not be categorically denied certain vaccinations.

Who Testified: PRO: Sen Marilyn Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Garry Lund, parent; John Moore, Mercury Awareness Team; Dr. Mark Geier, David Geier, The Genetics Centers of America & MedCon, Inc.

CON: Ken Bertrand, Group Health Cooperative; Ann Simons, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals; Laurie Lippold, Washington Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics.

Signed In, Unable to Testify, Submitted Written Testimony: PRO: Mary Ann Newell, Mercury Awareness Team; Lauri Pruett, Self.