



The Maryland State Medical Society

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TO: The Honorable Peter A. Hammen, Chairman
Members of the House Committee on Health & Government
Operations
The Honorable Sue Kullen

FROM: Joseph A. Schwartz, III
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J. Steven Wise

DATE: February 22, 2006

RE: **OPPOSE** – House Bill 394 – *Public Health – Mercury-Free
Vaccines - Requirements*

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi) which represents over 7,200 Maryland physicians and their patients opposes House Bill 394.

House Bill 394 proposes to prohibit, after 2007, the use of vaccines that contain mercury in trace amounts and in 2009 prohibits the use of vaccines or other injectibles that contain even trace amounts of mercury. MedChi respectively asserts that this prohibition is both unnecessary and not in the best interest of the public.

At issue because it contains mercury, is the chemical known as Thimerosal. Thimerosal has been used as an additive to biologics and vaccines since the 1930s because it is effective in killing bacteria and preventing bacterial contamination. While there is no evidence of harm caused by the low levels of thimerosal in vaccines and the risk is only theoretical, in 1999, family physicians, pediatricians, federal health officials and vaccine manufacturers established a goal of removing the vaccine preservative thimerosal as soon as possible from vaccines routinely recommended for infants. The goal was established as a precautionary measure to address public concern about the health effects of mercury exposure of any sort.

Since the issuance of that policy, there has been substantial progress in removing thimerosal from vaccines. Few if any vaccines have thimerosal as a component. Those that do have thimerosal, have only trace amounts, and its use is justified and does not create a threat to the health of an infant, pregnant women or individual.

It is important to note that the flu vaccine contains trace amounts of mercury. While there is a limited quantity of mercury-free flu vaccine, its availability cannot meet the public demand for the vaccine. In fact, there is an inadequate supply of flu vaccine with or without trace amounts of mercury. Clearly, there is no public health benefit to further restrict access to the flu vaccine.

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MedChi would further argue that state-by-state legislative prohibitions that affect the availability and use of vaccines could undermine confidence in the nation's immunization programs and jeopardize public health. The requirements of House Bill 394 provide no added public health benefit and could prove to be very detrimental. MedChi urges an unfavorable report.

For more information call:

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