

**CDC Key Messages for Responding to Inquiries Generated by the Fictional
Television Show “Eli Stone” Airing on ABC January 31
January 30, 2008**

With respect to an upcoming episode of a new ABC series, “Eli Stone”:

- **No one at CDC has viewed this program.** As with all entertainment programs that include a health and medical focus or storyline, it is very helpful if those shows are scientifically and medically accurate. In this case, that would apply to the show’s provision and depiction of immunization recommendations and the safety of vaccines. **Extensive reviews of the scientific and medical evidence by experts worldwide have concluded that recommended childhood vaccines, including influenza vaccine, do not cause autism or autism spectrum disorders.**
- **It would be unfortunate if this program, or any program, caused a parent to forgo a recommended childhood vaccination.** If parents or caregivers have questions about vaccines or vaccines and autism based on this show, we encourage them to talk with their child’s doctor or health care provider. They can also get additional information by calling: 1-800-CDC-INFO or by going to the CDC’s website: CDC.gov/autism
- **We hope that people will keep in mind that this show is a work of fiction.** It is common practice for producers and writers of entertainment programs, such as TV shows, to take extensive creative liberties with real-world events and issues to make their programs more interesting and entertaining. For example, “mercuritol,” is a fictional vaccine ingredient. As such, viewers need to be mindful that entertainment programs often include inaccuracies and exaggerations.
- **Entertainment-based television shows can be a source of information and education for viewers, but typically are not, nor should they be, a primary source for health and medical information.** Though it is a work of fiction, this show may still cause alarm or concern for parents. **As always, we encourage parents who have questions or concerns about vaccines to talk to their child’s physician or health care provider about any medical issues.**
- **We are not aware of any court in the U.S. that has found that vaccines or any ingredient in vaccines caused autism or an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).**
- It is important to remember, **vaccines protect and save lives.** Vaccines protect infants, children and adults from the unnecessary harm and premature death caused by vaccine-preventable diseases such as polio, whooping cough, and measles. Before the development of vaccines, thousands of babies died or were seriously disabled every year from these diseases. Because immunization programs of the 20th century were so successful, many of today’s young parents do not understand that the risk for these diseases to re-emerge is real.
- **CDC places a high priority on vaccine safety and the integrity and credibility of its vaccine safety research.** This commitment not only stems from our

scientific and medical dedication, it is also personal--for most of us who work at CDC are also parents and grandparents. And as such, we too, have high levels of personal interest and concern in the health and safety of children, families and communities.

- **CDC is fully committed to the health and well-being of children.** Our highest priority is to protect the health of children and to ensure that all children can live, play and learn to their fullest potential. We have learned a lot about the symptoms of autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and have improved efforts to track the disorders, but we still don't know a lot about the causes of ASDs. Scientists think that both genes and the environment play a role, and there might be many causes that lead to ASDs. We simply don't know what causes most cases of autism, but we're doing everything we can to find out.
- There is no convincing evidence that the low concentrations of thimerosal in vaccines have caused any harm other than minor reactions such as redness or swelling at the injection site. **The vast majority of science, conducted in the U.S. and around the world, does not support an association between thimerosal in vaccines and autism.** As a precautionary measure designed to help reduce children's exposure to mercury from all sources, the U.S. Public Health Service, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and vaccine manufacturers agreed in July 1999 that thimerosal should be reduced or eliminated from vaccines, one of the few sources where such action could be taken.
- **Today, with the exception of some influenza (flu) vaccines, none of the vaccines used in the U.S. to protect preschool children against 14 infectious diseases contain thimerosal as a preservative.** Many vaccines, including the Measles-Mumps-Rubella and chickenpox vaccine never contained thimerosal, and there are brands of influenza vaccine that are thimerosal-preservative free.
- For more information about autism, go to CDC.gov/autism