

**PRESS RELEASE FROM THE ROYAL FREE
HOSPITAL SCHOOL OF MEDICINE**

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NEW RESEARCH LINKS AUTISM AND BOWEL DISEASE

Researchers at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine may have discovered a new syndrome in children involving a new inflammatory bowel disease and autism. Their paper, to be published in *The Lancet* on 28 February, also suggests that in a number of cases the onset of behavioural symptoms was associated with MMR vaccination.

The research team studied 12 children who had a history of normal development followed by the loss of acquired skills such as language. All the children were found to have intestinal disorders, and nine of them were diagnosed as having autism. In eight cases the parents or the child's GP noticed the changes followed soon after the child received the MMR vaccination.

The research team, lead by Dr Andrew Wakefield, reader in experimental gastroenterology, and Professor John Walker-Smith, head of the department of paediatric gastroenterology, has subsequently investigated a further 40 patients, 39 of whom exhibited the same combination of intestinal and behavioural symptoms.

Dr Wakefield said: "The study has identified a possible link between gut disorders in children and autism. In the majority of cases the onset of symptoms occurred soon after the MMR vaccination. We clearly need further research to examine this new syndrome, and to look into a possible relation to the MMR vaccine."

The study involved a range of gastroenterological, neurological and developmental assessments by a multidisciplinary team of researchers.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

We have available a colour still of a child being immunised and a VNR. Please contact the press office on 0171 830 2963 for further details.

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Inflammatory bowel disease includes chronic inflammatory conditions of the gastro-intestinal tract. There are two main types: ulcerative colitis, that involves inflammation only in the colon and Crohn's disease that is characterised by patchy inflammation anywhere along the gastro-intestinal tract from the mouth to the anus.

Autism is a serious childhood disorder of intellectual and higher brain function which starts before the age of 30 months. Autistic children are withdrawn, self-absorbed, interested in objects but not in people and often unable to communicate by normal speech. They show stereotyped, self-centred behaviour patterns, repeating the same activity over and over again and possibly exhibiting rage if interrupted.