

Does MMR vaccine cause inflammatory bowel disease or autistic spectrum disorder?

No.

In 1998, Wakefield et al. (Royal Free Hospital, London) published a case-series study with 12 children suggesting that MMR vaccine caused inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), which then resulted in decreased absorption of essential vitamins and nutrients through the intestinal tract. They proposed that this could result in developmental disorders such as autism. *The Lancet* retracted this publication in 2010 and the British Medical Council struck off the lead author in 2010, following the British General Medical Council's Fitness to Practice Panel finding the author 'guilty of serious professional misconduct'.

An extensive review published in 2004 by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), an independent expert body in the United States, concluded that there is no association between the MMR vaccine and the development of autism. A 2011 update by the IOM continues to reject any causal association between MMR vaccine and autism (see www.iom.edu/vaccineadverseeffects).

See 4.9 *Measles* for further information. There is also an MMR vaccine decision aid designed for parents available at www.ncirs.edu.au/decisionaid/index.html.

Do childhood immunisations cause asthma?

There is no evidence that vaccination causes or worsens asthma. It is especially important that children with asthma be vaccinated like other children, as catching a disease like whooping cough can make an asthma attack worse. Although influenza vaccine is not routinely recommended for all asthmatics, it is recommended for severe asthmatics, such as those requiring frequent hospitalisation (see 4.7 *Influenza*).

Does influenza vaccine cause flu?

No. It is not possible for influenza vaccine to cause 'flu' as it is not a live viral vaccine. (*Note:* a live attenuated influenza vaccine is used in some countries, but not in Australia.) As some people experience side effects such as a mild fever after the vaccine, it is understandable that they may confuse these symptoms with actually having the flu. In addition, the influenza vaccine is recommended to be given at the commencement of the flu season. Hence, it is possible that a person who has contracted, and is incubating, influenza during vaccination will mistakenly believe the vaccine to be causal. In addition, influenza vaccine is given at the very time of year when there are a lot of upper respiratory tract infections (URTIs) around. It is not uncommon for someone to attribute an URTI within a week of an influenza vaccine to the vaccine dose. Importantly, URTI symptoms occurring after influenza vaccine should not put people off having the vaccine the following year.