

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS CALLS FOR CANCELLATION OF ABC'S 'ELI STONE' PREMIERE

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CHICAGO - The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is demanding ABC cancel the opening episode of "Eli Stone" scheduled for Thursday, January 31. As reported in The New York Times, the episode features a lawyer who argues in court that a vaccine caused a child's autism. While the show includes statements that science has refuted any link between autism and vaccines, the episode's conclusion delivers a contrary impression; the jury awards the mother \$5.2 million, leaving audiences with the destructive idea that vaccines do cause autism.

"A television show that perpetuates the myth that vaccines cause autism is the height of reckless irresponsibility on the part of ABC and its parent company, The Walt Disney Co.," said Renee R. Jenkins, MD, FAAP, president of the AAP. "If parents watch this program and choose to deny their children immunizations, ABC will share in the responsibility for the suffering and deaths that occur as a result. The consequences of a decline in immunization rates could be devastating to the health of our nation's children."

No scientific link has been found between vaccines and autism. The AAP and other health organizations will continue to work to ensure the safety of childhood vaccines. For accurate information on autism, immunization and other child health topics, visit the AAP's web site, www.aap.org.

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The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

The letter from the American Academy of Pediatrics to ABC:

January 25, 2008

Anne Sweeney
President, Disney-ABC Television Group
47 W. 66th St.
New York, NY 10023-6290

Dear Ms. Sweeney:

According to The New York Times, ABC plans to run an episode of “Eli Stone” in which the title character successfully argues in court that a vaccine caused a child’s autism. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), an organization of 60,000 pediatricians, is alarmed that this program could lead to a tragic decline in immunization rates. The AAP calls on ABC to cancel the episode.

Many people trust the health information presented on fictional television shows, which influences their decisions about health care. In the United Kingdom, erroneous reports linking the measles vaccine to autism prompted a decline in vaccination and the worst outbreak of measles in two decades, including the deaths of several children.

ABC will bear responsibility for the needless suffering and potential deaths of children from parents’ decisions not to immunize based on the content of the episode. If ABC persists in airing the show, the AAP urges the network to include a disclaimer emphasizing:

- No mercury is used as a preservative in routinely offered childhood vaccines.
- No scientific link exists between vaccines and autism.

Vaccines are the single-most powerful, cost-effective public health intervention ever developed. A network as influential as ABC must consider its responsibility not to promulgate messages that undermine the years of efforts by the AAP and public health community to persuade parents to vaccinate and protect their children. The consequences of a decline in immunization rates could be devastating to the health of our nation’s children.

Sincerely,

Renée R. Jenkins, MD, FAAP
President

RRJ/ssm

Cc:

Robert A. Iger
President and CEO, The Walt Disney Co.

Stephen McPherson
President, ABC Entertainment

David Westin
President, ABC News

Greg Berlanti
Co-creator and Executive Producer, “Eli Stone”

Timothy Johnson
Medical Editor, ABC News

Marc Guggenheim
Co-creator and Executive Producer, “Eli Stone”

Susan Sewell
Vice President, ABC Media Relations

Chris Misiano
Executive Producer and Director, “Eli Stone”