

There is No Autism Epidemic

By: David Kirby

It's been nearly two years since the release of my book, [Evidence of Harm, Mercury in Vaccines and the Autism Epidemic - A Medical Controversy](#), and I continue to be vilified by critics who insist that mercury does not cause autism, that autism is a stable genetic condition, and that it cannot be an "epidemic."

I am going to declare a New Year's truce, and announce that my critics are 100 percent correct. This year, I hope we can ALL agree on one thing: There is no autism epidemic.

Among my most spirited and articulate detractors is a group of adults with autism who belong to a movement that refers to itself as the "neurodiversity" community. These adults argue passionately that autism is neither a disease nor a disorder, but rather a natural and special variation of the chance genetic imprint left upon human behavior. Most of them, I believe, have what science calls Asperger's Syndrome, or very high functioning autism.

From their eloquent and well reasoned point of view, autism has no "cause," and it certainly requires no "cure." To suggest otherwise is to brand these adults with the stigma of disease and disability, which is patently absurd given their educational and intellectual achievements. It's like saying that left-handers or gays are deviant and need treatment - something that reasonable people stopped doing years ago.

So maybe autism really is just an odd genetic peculiarity that yields atypical people whose own set of talents and gifts can lead to perfectly happy and fulfilled lives, with little or no dependence on others for their survival.

If that's the case, then autism has always been with us at some steady, but largely overlooked rate. Growing awareness and better diagnostics have certainly helped us identify and count more people with the condition, who might have been mislabeled as "quirky" or "nerdy" a decade ago. But if that's autism, then the kids that I have met suffer from some other condition entirely.

When I talk about "curing" autism, I am not talking about curing the "neurodiverse." I am talking about kids who begin talking and then, suddenly, never say another word. I'm talking about kids who may never learn to read, write, tie their shoes or fall in love. I'm talking about kids who sometimes wail in torture at three in the morning because something inside them hurts like a burning coal, but they can't say what or where it is. I'm talking about kids who can barely keep food in their inflamed, distressed guts, and when they do, it winds up in rivers of diarrhea or swirls of feces spread on a favorite carpet or pet (no one said this kind of "autism" was pretty). I'm talking about kids who escape from their home in a blaze of alarms, only to be found hours later, freezing, alone, and wandering the Interstate. I'm talking about kids who have bitten their mother so hard and so often, they are on a first name basis at the emergency room. I'm talking about kids who spin like fireworks until they fall and crack their heads, kids who will play with a pencil but not with their sister, kids who stare at nothing and scream at everything and don't even realize it when their dad comes home from work. These are the kids I want to see cured. And I don't believe they have "autism."

Scientists tell us that 1-in-104 American boys are currently diagnosed with some form of autism spectrum disorder. But the mildest, "high functioning" forms of autism have seemingly little in common with the most severe or even moderate cases. My hunch (and yes, that is all it is) is that most of these kids do not have "autism" at all, and it's probably time we started calling it something else.

American kids are in huge trouble. One in six has a learning disability. Asthma, diabetes, allergies and arthritis are ravaging their bodies in growing numbers. And little of this is due to "better diagnostics" or "greater awareness." It can only be attributed to radical changes in our environment over the last 10-20 years. There is something, or more likely some things in our modern air, water, food and drugs that are making genetically susceptible children sick, and we need to find out what they are.

Mercury remains a logical candidate for contributing to "autism spectrum disorders," either alone or in combination with other environmental insults. Mercury exposure can kill brain cells. It can cause loss of speech and eye contact, digestive and immune dysfunction, social withdrawal and anxiety, and repetitive and self-injurious behaviors. So maybe we should leave the autistics in peace and focus on these environmentally toxic kids and what it is that ails them.

Maybe what these kids have is not autism, but something like, say, "Environmentally-acquired Neuroimmune Disorder," which we could call E.N.D. (Great slogan: "Let's End E.N.D."). Maybe that would explain why a recent CDC-funded study of the San Francisco Bay Area showed that kids with "autism" were 50% more likely to be born in neighborhoods with high levels of airborne toxins, especially mercury. If a second study underway in Baltimore yields similar data, it will be that much harder to defend the "better diagnosis" argument, (other studies have shown an association between autism rates and proximity to coal-fired power plants).

So maybe what we have here is just a semantic failure to communicate. Columbus thought he had met "Indians," and we only recently began to use the term "Native American." Columbus was not in the Indies, mercury doesn't cause autism, and there is no autism epidemic.