



NATIONAL HEALTH FREEDOM ACTION

NHFA Health Freedom Leaders Report on Minnesota Measles Cases and Background May 25, 2017

Minnesota is currently experiencing an outbreak of measles. Most of the cases are in the Somali community.

In response to the measles cases in their community, Somali parents are being encouraged by the Minnesota Department of Health, medical centers and facilities, as well as the conventional general media outlets, to have their children obtain the MMR (Mumps, Measles, and Rubella) vaccine. But a number of Somali parents have declined the vaccines because they have experienced their children suffering severe adverse effects, including life-long permanent injury, from vaccines, particularly the MMR vaccine.

Somali parents have reached out to Minnesota vaccine safety groups and leaders and have begun to share their stories. Vaccine leaders from [National Health Freedom Coalition \(NHFC\)](#), [National Health Freedom Action \(NHFA\)](#), Vaccine Safety Council of Minnesota (VSCMN), and Vaccine Awareness Minnesota (VAM), have listened to these accounts, and have begun educating Somali parents about their right in Minnesota to make their own decisions about vaccinations for their children.

Minnesota has a fast-growing immigrant community, including over 40,000 people of Somali descent.^[i] Many Somali parents have shared that since coming to America, they have had the terrible experience of seeing their children suffer severe adverse effects from vaccines, particularly the MMR vaccine. More and more parents are reporting the same thing - an alarming reaction to the vaccine, with fever, diarrhea and vomiting, seizures, and regression of functions.

Vaccine safety leaders have heard from Abdirisak Jama, whose son suffered a seizure in the car on the way home from getting his MMR shot. His son "lost everything," all of his current capabilities, according to his father. Abdirisak's son is now 14 years old, needs complete care, and has no ability to speak.

They heard from the parent of a child who developed diarrhea within hours of the vaccine, diarrhea that never really ended. He lost his ability to eat foods, eventually needing constant naso-gastric tube for feeding, and eventually died.

They heard about Somali children who were talking according to their age level, up until the day they got the MMR vaccine, and that was the last day that these children ever spoke. This has happened so frequently that the MMR vaccine became known in the Somali community as "the vaccine that makes your child stop talking".

In response to these experiences, the vaccine safety advocate's and the Somali community members discussed the need for more research into the high incidence of vaccine injuries in the Somali community.

In 2010, a study was launched by the University of Minnesota's Institute of Community Integration called "The Minneapolis Somali Autism Spectrum Disorder Prevalence Project".^[ii] The study was designed to answer the question: "Is there a higher prevalence of ASD in Somali children who live in Minneapolis versus non-Somali children?". The results of the study showed that about 1 in 32 Somali children aged 7-9 years was identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder. This was in contrast to the overall rate of the study estimated at 1 in 48, with the White population at 1 in 36, the Black (non-Somali) population at 1 in 62, and the Hispanic population at 1 in 80. The study also indicated that males were more likely to be identified as having ASD than females in all racial and ethnic groups in Minneapolis.^[iii] The Minnesota Department of Health's view of the study stated that there was no statistically meaningful difference between the two estimates of Somalis and Whites. ^[iv]

In 2012, the Minnesota Legislature authorized a [study by the Minnesota Department of Health](#) on the experiences of having a child with autism among the Somali community. The study was intended to understand “cultural- and resource-based aspects of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) that are unique to the Somali community.” With the approval of the Minnesota Department of Health, the study was extended to also include the Hmong and Latino communities. The study was not intended to assess the prevalence or incidence of autism spectrum disorders or the causes of these disorders. [v]

Notably, in 2013, a research study was completed at the Mayo clinic on Somali recipients of the rubella vaccine (one component of the MMR) and led by Dr. Gregory Poland MD. The results showed that Somali individuals receiving the vaccine had an immune response twice as great as Caucasians and that a non-Somali, African-American cohort ranked next in immune response, still significantly higher than Caucasians, and Hispanic Americans in the study were least responsive to the vaccine. [vi] This study may shed some light on the high rate of adverse reactions in Somali individuals to the MMR vaccine.

Despite reports of vaccine injuries, in 2015, a bill was introduced in the MN legislature that would make it more difficult for Minnesota parents to act upon their right to decline vaccines by applying for an exemption for entrance to day care or school. This bill would have changed Minnesota’s long-standing law protecting the right of parents to decline childhood vaccines for their children before entering school by filling out an exemption form stating they decline based on conscientiously health beliefs. The bill would have required that before an exemption could be obtained, a parent would first have to go to a doctor and listen to his/her presentation on vaccination information that was consistent with Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. In Minnesota, strong opposition to the bill was mounted. Somali parents worked side by side with non-Somali parents from Vaccine Safety Council of MN, National Health Freedom Action and National Health Freedom Coalition, and Vaccine Awareness Minnesota to reinforce the importance of parental choice on vaccination and on all medical procedures. The bill was defeated and did not pass.

Somali parents understandably have decided not to give their child the MMR vaccine based on their experiences. In 2007 the MMR rate of vaccinated two year olds for Somali children was 84% and non- Somali children was 88%. But in 2008 rate in the Somali community dropped to 70%, and by 2012 it was 46%. [vii] In 2017, the rate is 42%.

In April of 2017, measles cases appeared in Minnesota, primarily in the Somali community, primarily in unvaccinated individuals but with some cases in the vaccinated population. The health care community is reaching out and educating parents about measles, how to identify measles, and how to take good care of children contracting measles so that they safely return to full health with life-long immunity. Vaccine safety groups are supporting the Somali parents in gathering accurate information about measles and measles vaccines and supporting parental decision-making and their rights to be in charge of the decision-making for their children regarding medical procedures.

The Minnesota Department of Health has held many meetings with the Somali community, with faith leaders, and health care professionals to advise people to vaccinate all those who had not received the MMR vaccine. Parents of unvaccinated children have been informed that they would be excluded from day cares and schools where there were outbreaks. Day care centers have been closed for quarantine periods.

At the Minnesota 2017 legislature, Rep. Mike Friberg, the author of the 2015 restrictive vaccine bill, renewed his call to pass the 2015 vaccine bill that was designed to make it more difficult to decline vaccines, now known as HF 96. Vaccine safety advocates sponsored a Lobby Day in the 2017 session, and over 60 advocates visited with legislators to speak to them about the importance of maintaining Minnesota's conscientious exemption to vaccine mandates. They worked to raise awareness about the serious concerns regarding vaccines and the multiple vaccination policies for young developing children. **They informed legislators that vaccines are not without risk: the federal Vaccine Injury Compensation Program has compensated 469 parents for disability from the MMR vaccine; 59 of those cases were for death following the MMR vaccine. Advocates reinforced the idea that where there is risk, there must be choice.**

Vaccine safety leaders informed the Legislators about the CDC misrepresentation in their CDC research on the MMR vaccine, which falsely showed no link between vaccines and autism. Legislators were educated that CDC lead vaccine scientist Dr. William Thompson had come forward and admitted that the study had been fraudulently manipulated, and that it actually showed an increase in autism among children given the MMR before 36 months, as compared to earlier than 36 months, particularly in African American children. Legislators were also informed that the CDC will not allow Dr. Thompson to publicly speak unless he is subpoenaed by Congress. Congress has not yet subpoenaed Dr. Thompson.

NHFA and NHFC stand strongly for the right of parents to make final decisions about all medical care for their children, including vaccinations. The parental right to make these decisions is a fundamental constitutional right that we shall forever work to protect. We firmly assert that Minnesota must maintain exemption opportunities for parents to vaccines recommended by the government before admittance to school. We support the right of the state to organize quarantine policies as spelled out under Minnesota law and for citizens to abide by such with due process and the least restrictive infringements on personal autonomy as also spelled out in Minnesota law. We will always hold that ultimately it is the parents that must weigh the risks and benefits of all health care interventions and decide what is best for their child.

[i] Statistics of Minnesota Somali population: <http://www.mncompass.org/immigration/groups-at-a-glance-somali>

[ii] The Minneapolis Somali Autism Spectrum Disorder Prevalence Project: <http://rtc.umn.edu/autism/>

[iii] Id. Prevalence project: <http://rtc.umn.edu/autism/>

[iv] Minnesota Department of Health Website: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/cfh/topic/autism/somali.cfm>

[v] MDH culture study

[vi] Mayo Clinic Website: <http://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayo-clinic-discovers-african-americans-respond-better-to-rubella-vaccine/>

[vii] Minnesota Department of Health, Perspectives on Vaccine Resistance, MMR Vaccine Resistance in Minnesota Somalis, Lynn Bahta, BSN, PHN