

Opening Statement
Chairman Dan Burton
Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness
Hearing entitled, "The SV40 Virus: Has Tainted Polio Vaccine Caused an Increase in Cancer?"
September 10, 2003

Immunization to protect people from infectious diseases was one of the greatest public health advances of the twentieth century.

However, immunization is a very different medical procedure than treating an active disease or injury. Immunizations introduce a potentially disease-causing agent into a healthy body, and all experts agree that no immunization is without its risks.

This is a situation where government policy overrides individual rights. With very few exceptions, immunizations are mandatory. Infants and young children have absolutely no choice in the matter, and their parents rarely have a choice.

Government mandates require vaccinations before admission to day care, school, or college. Just last week, Nearly 10,000 Washington, DC school kids were turned away on the first day of school because their immunization records were not up-to-date. They couldn't go to class until they got their shots. Those in military service get another battery of shots.

When freedom of choice conflicts with government edicts, government nearly always prevails.

Because immunizations are mandatory, government agencies at all levels have a duty to exercise the utmost care in the approval, administration, and post-administration surveillance of vaccines. In fact, the Public Health Act of 1902 imposed the duty upon the Public Health Service to: "Insure the safety, purity, and potency" of vaccines.

Insure is a very strong word. However, doing anything less is a breach of the public trust, and could destroy the public's confidence in vaccines.

The development of polio vaccines in the 1950s and early 1960s was especially welcome, because of the devastating toll of death, disability, and suffering that polio caused. However, some parents, and a growing number of scientists, now believe that the government did not insure the purity, potency, and safety of some polio vaccines, and that a breach of the public trust did in fact occur.

There is no dispute that millions of Americans received polio vaccines that were contaminated with a virus called simian virus 40 (SV40).

There also is no dispute that SV40 is capable of causing cancer.

But there is a major dispute as to how many Americans may have received the contaminated vaccine, with estimates ranging from 4 million to 100 million.

There is also a major dispute as to when the polio vaccine supply got cleaned-up. In addition, nobody knows how many people got sick or died because of the contaminated vaccines.

This Subcommittee's efforts to give a full and fair hearing to this important issue today are somewhat impaired by the lack of participation by some key Federal health agencies.

The Food and Drug Administration informed our staff that they were having trouble locating FDA staff with sufficient knowledge to be of much help, and that they needed more time to study it. They promised to submit a statement for the record within the next two weeks. We'll anxiously watch for their statement, and we'll give the appropriate FDA personnel the opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee when they have been located.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that they don't keep records on things that happened 40 or 50 years ago, and that they could not be very helpful. That in and of itself raises a serious question in my mind. We are not talking about the common cold here. We

are talking about polio – the most devastating epidemic of the first half of the twentieth century – we are talking about tainted vaccines that were given to millions of American children and young adults! I think the FDA and the CDC need to look a little harder for their records.

The National Cancer Institute has sent a representative in the person of Dr. James Goedert. We thank you Dr. Goedert for appearing, and we thank your agency for sending you to testify today.

I also want to thank the other witnesses who are here and I look forward to hearing your testimony.