

Ask the Pediatrician

Solving the Riddles of Parenthood



1. Unraveling the Mystery of Autism

Q: I recently saw a television program about the Measles/Mumps/Rubella (MMR) immunization and autism. What exactly is autism, and is there a link between the vaccination and the condition?

A: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities that impair social, emotional, and communication skills. Many people with ASDs might repeat certain behaviors again and again and might have trouble changing their daily routine. They also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to situations. The cognitive abilities of people with ASDs can vary from gifted to severely challenged. ASDs begin before the age of 3 and last throughout a person's life. Boys are four times more likely than girls to suffer from an ASD, which affects approximately one in every 150 children. There is no single best treatment package for all children with an ASD.

Regarding immunization and autism, extensive evaluations by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Institute of Medicine, and the CDC conclude that there's no proven association between MMR vaccine and autism. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development says, "To date there is no definite, scientific proof that any vaccine or combination of vaccines can cause autism. It's important to know that vaccines actually help the immune system to defend the body."

To help pediatricians identify the signs and symptoms of an ASD as early as possible, guide parents through early interventions, and help families manage educational strategies and behavioral therapies, the AAP recently issued two comprehensive reports.

Both reports are part of a new AAP practical resource for pediatricians called "AUTISM: Caring for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Resource Toolkit for Clinicians." The kit includes screening and surveillance tools, guideline summary charts, management checklists, developmental checklists, developmental growth charts, early intervention referral forms and tools, sample letters to insurance companies, and family handouts.

For more information, visit www.aap.org.

2. A Pajama Party

Q: I have eight nieces and nephews all younger than 5 years old and wanted to give them all similar gifts for their birthdays. I decided to give each of them a pair of pajamas, but I had no idea there were so many safety considerations. Can you offer some advice on purchasing sleepwear?

A: It's wise to do your homework before purchasing this type of clothing because fabric and fit are important safety considerations for children's sleepwear. The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) provides the following brief guide to federal requirements for sleepwear for infants to children's size 14:

- **Infant sizes up to 9 months:** All infant sleepwear in sizes to 9 months may be made from either flame-resistant or non-flame-resistant fabrics. Flame-resistant sleepwear does not ignite easily and must self-extinguish quickly to meet the U.S. CPSC flammability requirements for children's sleepwear. Flame-resistant garments may be worn either loose fitting or snug-fitting. Pajamas that are non-flame-resistant are made from natural fabrics, such as cotton, and must be worn snug-fitting. This will not create an unreasonable risk of burn injuries to children.
- **Infant sizes above 9 months to children's size 14:** Children's sleepwear larger than size 9 months must either be flame resistant or fit snugly.

3. Spreading the Word on MRSA

Q: What is MRSA? How can I protect my three teenagers against it?

A: MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a bacterium that causes infections on the surface of the skin or can go into the soft tissue to form a boil or abscess. MRSA has become a significant public-health concern because the bacterium has become resistant to many antibiotics, making the infections difficult to treat.

Once limited to hospitals, medical centers, and nursing homes, MRSA (also called staph infection) is now commonly spread in schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and day care centers. Community-associated MRSA is often spread in crowded areas, through skin-to-skin contact, from cuts and abrasions from contaminated items and surfaces.

The best ways to protect your children from getting MRSA at school or other public places include:

- **Practice good hygiene.** Make sure they keep their hands clean by washing them with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and showering immediately after participating in sports or activities.
- **Cover any skin abrasions or cuts your children have with a clean dry bandage until they're healed.**
- **Don't allow your children to share personal items — such as towels — with anyone. Have them use a barrier — such as a towel or clothing — between their skin and shared equipment, such as weight-training benches.**
- **Sanitize frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that**

come into direct contact with people's skin.

- **Wash soiled sheets, towels and clothes in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.**

If a wound appears to be infected, take your child to a pediatrician. Treatment may include draining the infection and antibiotics.

4. Pass on Bumper Pads



Q: My husband and I are preparing a nursery for our first child. Should we put bumper pads in the crib?

A: Although bumper pads are a nice decorative touch that are designed to prevent a baby from being injured while in the crib or bassinet, a recent study says the risk of death or injury from using them outweighs their benefits.

Pediatric researchers from the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis reviewed three U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission databases for deaths related to crib bumpers and crib-related injuries from 1985 to 2005. They found that 27 children from 1 month to 2 years old died from suffocation or strangulation related to the bumper pads or their ties. They also found 25 non-fatal infant injuries attributed to bumper pads.

"Many infants lack the motor development needed to free themselves when they become wedged between the bumper pad and another surface," said Bradley Thach, M.D., professor of pediatrics and staff physician at St. Louis Children's Hospital. "They are likely to suffocate because they are rebreathing expired air or their nose and mouth are compressed."

Thach recommended that parents not use bumper pads in cribs or bassinets. "I don't think bumper pads are doing any good," he said. "Although the deaths and injuries may be rare events, they are preventable by eliminating the use of bumper pads."