

Handout A

Instructions

Congratulations! You have been elected to the United States House of Representatives. Today you will vote on a bill that focuses on government funding of a research study on the health impacts of vaccines.

Step 1: Research

In the late 1990s, a medical journal published an article by Andrew Wakefield. Wakefield linked vaccinations to autism. Autism is a condition of the brain that affects people's ability to communicate with others. Wakefield's article caused many parents to stop vaccinating their children.

Years later, an official medical board found that Wakefield had committed fraud. That means he was dishonest in his research for the article. His doctor's license was taken away. The medical journal retracted ("unpublished") the article. Doctors who had supported Wakefield's research no longer supported him.

The U.S. Government continued to address the issue.

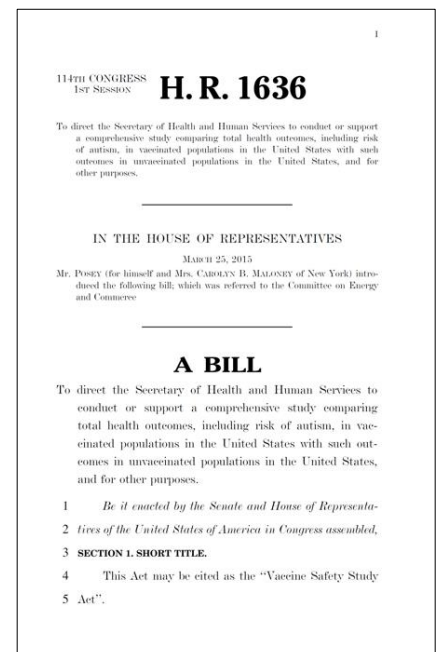
1. Read Source B and answer the questions below.

The Vaccine Safety Study Act (H. R. 1636): A BILL To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct or support a comprehensive study comparing total health outcomes, including risk of autism, in vaccinated populations in the United States with such outcomes in unvaccinated populations in the United States, and for other purposes.

Source B or <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/1636/text>

What is this source?

Why do you think it was created?



What does this source tell you about the importance of vaccines?

What does this source tell you about the thimerosal controversy?

What does this source tell you about “unvaccinated populations”? How will they be used in the study? How will the government identify these populations?

2. Read Source C and answer the questions below.

“Vaccines Do Not Cause Autism: A Report from the Center for Disease Control.”

Source C or

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/concerns/autism.html>

What is this source?

Why was it created?

What are the main points that this source tells you about vaccines?

Vaccines Do Not Cause Autism

[Autism spectrum disorder \(ASD\)](#) is a developmental disability that is caused by differences in how the brain functions. People with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in different ways. Recent estimates from CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network found that about 1 in 68 children have been identified with ASD in communities across the United States. CDC is committed to providing essential data on ASD, searching for causes of and factors that increase the risk for ASD, and developing resources that help identify children with ASD as early as possible.

There is no link between vaccines and autism.

Some people have had concerns that ASD might be linked to the vaccines children receive, but studies have shown that there is no link between receiving vaccines and developing ASD. In 2011, an Institute of Medicine (IOM) [report](#) on eight vaccines given to children and adults found that with rare exceptions, these vaccines are very safe.

A 2013 CDC study [\(PDF, 204 KB\)](#) added to the research showing that vaccines do not cause ASD. The study looked at the number of antigens (substances in vaccines that cause the body's immune system to produce disease-fighting antibodies) from vaccines during the first two years of life. The results showed that the total amount of antigen from vaccines received was the same between children with ASD and those that did not have ASD.

Vaccine ingredients do not cause autism.

One vaccine ingredient that has been studied specifically is [thimerosal](#), a mercury-based preservative used to prevent contamination of multidose vials of vaccines. Research shows that thimerosal does not cause ASD. In fact, a 2004 [scientific review](#) by the IOM concluded that “the evidence favors rejection of a causal relationship between thimerosal-containing vaccines and autism.” Since 2003, there have been [nine CDC-funded or conducted studies \(PDF, 357 KB\)](#) that have found no link between thimerosal-containing vaccines and ASD, as well as no link between the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine and ASD in children.

Between 1999 and 2001, thimerosal was removed or reduced to trace amounts in all childhood vaccines except for some flu vaccines. This was done as part of a broader national effort to reduce all types of mercury exposure in

Summarize what this source tells you about thimerosal. Is thimerosal a risk for children being vaccinated?

Step 2: Discuss and Decide

Though scientific evidence has so far shown that there is no link between autism and vaccines, many people in your state think that they do not have enough information to decide whether or not vaccinations are safe. They agree with the statements in Section 2 of the Vaccine Safety Study Act that the government should fund a study of vaccines for safety.

Many others believe there is enough research done already. They agree with the findings of the Centers for Disease Control that vaccines are safe, or at least that they are not linked to autism in any way.

Section 3 of the Vaccine Safety Study Act describes how the government-funded study will be done. You need to decide if you will support what Section 3 describes.

To decide how you will vote on the bill, it is important to think about all sides of the issue. Now you will get together with some other members of Congress to discuss the bill.

In your group:

1. Discuss and determine the best argument for opposing the bill:

2. Discuss and determine the best argument for supporting the bill:

3. Which document, the Vaccine Safety Study Act or the report from the Centers for Disease Control, does your group think is based on stronger scientific evidence? Why?

4. Take a quick vote to see where everyone in your group is leaning (support or oppose).

5. Based on all of the evidence and the discussion, state and support your own position: