



Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA, Executive Vice President, CEO

January 25, 2008

Carissa Gilmore  
ABC Media Relations, "Eli Stone"  
ABC Inc.  
500 Buena Vista Street  
Burbank, CA 91521-4551

Dear Ms. Gilmore:

As the nation's leading physician organization, the American Medical Association is deeply concerned with the misleading medical content of the upcoming premiere of ABC's new show *Eli Stone*. We urge ABC to take immediate action to mitigate the harm this episode may do. Parents of young children might decide to forego safe and effective vaccinations for their children based on the show's faulty premise that vaccines cause autism. This is no false fear – in the United Kingdom, media coverage on an erroneous report linking the measles vaccine to autism sparked a drop in immunization rates, resulting in multiple deaths and hospitalizations of children who were not immunized and then contracted measles.

Scientific data overwhelmingly show that there is no connection between vaccines and autism. In fact, the suspected vaccine component, thimerosal, was phased out of vaccines in 2002. The *Eli Stone* episode comes immediately following several major developments that have helped put to rest the false theory that your show inflames. For example, a recent scientific paper published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, indicates that autism rates in California continue to increase, despite the removal of thimerosal from vaccines. Additionally, a recently released court opinion in Maryland also ruled against this causal relationship.

Ideally, the episode should be rewritten to make the scientific data clear; however, if that is not possible the AMA proposes the following action to help parents understand that vaccines are safe and effective for their children. ABC should:

- Make clear that this *Eli Stone* episode does not reflect the reality of current scientific and medical opinion, perhaps through a strong disclaimer at the beginning and the end of the show.
- Follow the episode with an informational statement, perhaps by ABC News physician Dr. Tim Johnson that clearly states the multiple benefits of vaccines to the individual and to society, and emphasizing that vaccines do not cause autism.

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ABC News has actually been a leader in accurately portraying this issue, and it would be a shame if ABC's entertainment division undid the good work being done by ABC's News division to educate the public on the importance of vaccination.

Autism is a heart-wrenching condition, and the upheaval felt by parents whose children have been diagnosed with autism is understandable – as is their search for answers. We need more research to investigate the actual causes of autism, but it would be a disservice to the health of our children if we let vaccines take the blame for this tragic and complex disease.

Thank you for your attention to this critical public health matter. The AMA's Director of Infectious Disease, Litjen (L.J.) Tan, PhD, is available to assist you in any way to improve the outcome of this show. You can reach him directly at 312-464-4147.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Maves". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA