AMA backs evidence-based vaccine policy, opposes new commission

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At the 2017 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago, the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) adopted policies aimed at protecting children’s health by addressing vaccine policy, the rising incidence of myopia, lead poisoning and ocular burns from liquid laundry packets.

It remains clear that the use of vaccines benefits public and individual health. Yet the authors of a resolution on the topic said that “physicians remain concerned the current federal administration may attempt to establish new vaccine policy based on unfounded and unscientific facts.”

In recognition that vaccinations are safe and effective, and that their benefits far outweigh any risks, the AMA adopted policy that:

- Supports the rigorous scientific process of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices as well as its development of recommended immunization schedules for the nation.
- Recognizes the substantial body of scientific evidence that has disproven a link between vaccines and autism.
- Opposes the creation of a new federal commission on vaccine safety whose task is to study an association between autism and vaccines.

“The AMA fully supports the overwhelming body of evidence and rigorous scientific process used by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices which demonstrate vaccines are among the most effective and safest interventions to both prevent individual illness and protect the health of the public,” William E. Kobler, MD said in a statement. Dr. Kobler is a member of the AMA Board of Trustees.

“We are deeply concerned that creating a new federal commission on vaccine safety to study the already disproven association between autism and vaccines would cause unnecessary confusion and adversely impact parental decision-making and immunization practices,” Dr. Kobler added. “The
United States has a long-standing system for ensuring the ongoing development, safety, and efficacy of vaccines.”

“The AMA will continue its work to promote public understanding and confidence in the use of vaccines in order to prevent resurgence in vaccine-preventable illnesses and deaths,” concluded Dr. Kobler.

**Rx to prevent myopia: the great outdoors**

According to research cited in an HOD resolution, myopia is “the leading cause of visual impairment globally.” Nearsightedness continues to increase among children worldwide and is likely to affect 50 percent of the world’s population by 2050. The resolution also stated that nearsightedness might “lead to lower quality of life, financial burden, retinal detachment and macular degeneration” in children.

To help prevent myopia onset and progression in school children and adolescents, delegates adopted policy supporting efforts aimed at encouraging children to spend more time outside participating in various outdoor activities instead of remaining indoors. The new policy would also promote other activities that have been shown to reduce the onset of myopia in children and adolescents.

“We know that children today spend an extraordinary amount of time staring at electronic screens, which limits their outdoor activity and adversely affects their eyesight,” Dr. Kobler said in a statement.

“That is why we are supporting efforts to encourage children to unplug and head outside,” Dr. Kobler said.

**Comprehensive action on lead sources**

Lead in domestic water remains a problem in many communities across the United States. According to an HOD resolution, 4.9 percent of children in Flint, Michigan “were found to have lead poisoning in 2015.” Even if many communities have not experienced the same devastation as Flint, lead pipes still remain in dozens of communities around the country, according to data cited in the resolution.

“We know there is no safe level of lead exposure, yet children living in the U.S. continue to be exposed to unsafe levels of lead in their homes and in the water they drink. In fact, 20 percent of the lead that is ingested comes from the drinking water flowing through lead plumbing in communities across the nation,” Willarda V. Edwards, MD, MBA, said in a statement. Dr. Edwards is a member of the AMA Board of Trustees.

The reference committee heard a large amount of testimony in support of this resolution, with a focus
on multiple possible sources of lead poisoning, not just in water sources.

Delegates adopted policy to support requiring “an environmental assessment of dwellings, residential buildings or child-care facilities following the notification that a child occupant or frequent inhabitant has a confirmed elevated blood lead level.” This complete environmental assessment will help determine the potential source of lead poisoning in those children, whether through the testing of the water supply or another origin.

“For pregnant women and children, the dangers of lead exposure are particularly severe. That is why we support changes to laws that would require mandatory environmental assessments of homes and childcare facilities, including testing the water supply, when cases of child lead poisoning have been confirmed,” Dr. Edwards said.

Laundry packets’ hidden dangers

Over a five-year period, there were 1,201 liquid laundry packet-related ocular burns among children between 3 and 4 years old, according to data cited in an HOD resolution. In 2015, the Detergent Poisoning and Child Safety Act was introduced to require the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to set mandatory safety standards for liquid laundry packets, the resolution says. The AMA supported the legislation.

The resolution, offered by the American Academy of Ophthalmology, argued that a voluntary American Society for Testing and Materials “standard neither requires a reformulation of liquid laundry packets to make them less caustic to children, nor do they require changes in color and design to make them less attractive to children.”

To ensure the voluntary ASTM standard adequately protects children from injury, such as ocular burns, the HOD directed the Association to “encourage the Consumer Product Safety Commission, in conjunction with the American Association of Poison Control Centers, to study the impact of ASTM’s standard that is currently in place.

Read more news coverage of the 2017 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago.