



The Institute for Policy Innovation

Are Politics Driving the CDC's Pending Decision on an Infant Meningitis Vaccine?

Event Recap



For decades, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has championed immunization against a host of deadly diseases. But in a sudden reversal, CDC is now signaling it may not recommend the routine administration of a proven new vaccine to prevent infant meningitis, an often fatal disease.

The Institute for Policy Innovation held a briefing on October 14, 2011, featuring testimonies from health care and FDA experts examining how and why the CDC may be restricting access to a new meningitis vaccine for infants. The briefing also featured the release of a new study evaluating the disparities in how government programs place economic value on human life.

To watch the video of each panel or keynote click on the hot spot.

► The event kicked off with a presentation by Christopher Stomberg, Ph.D., a partner with Bates White Economic Consulting, whose new study, "Policy Priorities and the Value of Life," evaluates disparities in how government programs place economic value on human life, with a special focus showing the differences between Medicare coverage for the elderly and the Centers for Disease Control's child immunization program.



◄ Nurse practitioner Gretchen Moen, founder and owner of Eagan Child and Family Care of Eagan, Minn., testified that as a health care professional, she encounters difficulties when talking to parents about adding vaccines to a child's immunization schedule when there isn't a clear message from the CDC that the vaccine should be administered.



◀ Dr. Richard Judelsohn, medical director of New York's Erie County Department of Health, discussed the devastating effects of invasive bacterial meningitis infections in infants, and gave firsthand knowledge of public health hearings in which some experts discouraged health officials from investing in the vaccines due to their cost. Judelsohn went on to describe how the highest rate of meningitis occurs in infants, beginning with an insidious onset and within 24 hours rapidly progressing, often ending in death.

▶ Peter Pitts, president and co-founder of the Center for Medicine in the Public Interest, described how vaccines have delivered the public from scores of diseases, and how particularly frightening and counterintuitive it is for the CDC to be delaying on the infant meningitis vaccine because the strain is far worse in infants. Pitts concluded his remarks by warning that without a CDC recommendation, the vaccine would fall under "health care redlining," which occurs when off-schedule vaccines become available only to those who can afford them.



◀ IPI resident scholar and health care expert Dr. Merrill Matthews moderated the event, providing introductory remarks and facilitating the question and answer portion of the program.

Matthews not only served as the past president of the Health Economics Roundtable for the National Association for Business Economics, the largest trade association of business economists, but also as the medical ethicist for the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center's Institutional Review Board for Human Experimentation.



▶ Congressman Michael Burgess, MD (TX-26) greets panelists at the event. Dr. Burgess spent nearly three decades practicing medicine before being elected to Congress, where he now serves as vice chairman of the Subcommittee on Health and in 2009 founded and serves as chairman of the Congressional Health Care Caucus.

