

Autism, Ileal-lymphoid-Nodular Hyperplasia and Measles

In 1998 a form of chronic colitis was described in which patchy chronic inflammation of the colon is associated with expanded and confluent lymphoid nodules in the mucosa of the distal ileum. The condition was named lymphoid nodular hyperplasia (LNH) of the ileum [1]. Remarkably, LNH was found in 93% of 60 children with autism in comparison to 29% of 42 children without autism [2]. Now measles virus was found in intestinal tissue of 91 children with autism, compared to 5 of 70 control patients [3] supporting an early hypothesis that autism and exposure to measles virus may be causally related [1]. The exact nature of the virus and notably if it is identical to the vaccine strain is yet unknown.

Comment: A close temporal relationship between MMR-vaccination and the onset of first autistic symptoms in 8 of the 12 original patients with LNH had led to an early suggestion that the behavioral disorder may have been triggered by the vaccination [1]. The suspicion that MMR vaccination may cause a pervasive developmental disorder, notably autism, raised public concern and led to legal action against the manufacturers [4]. However, a statistical relationship does not establish a causal one and it may be the other way around, namely that enterocolitis, which is quite common in autistic children [5], causes failure of viral clearance [4]. It should also be kept in mind that 'autism' is a heterogeneous disorder rather than an etiologic entity and that many factors, including genetic predisposition influence its development [6]. In multiple epidemiological studies no association was found between autism/developmental regression and MMR vaccination [7].

Literature

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