News Release

HOW THE ANTI-VACCINE MOVEMENT THREATENS AMERICA’S CHILDREN

Embargoed for release: Monday, October 4, 2010

Media Contacts:  Susan Stevens Martin  Debbie Linchesky  NCE Press Room  
ssmartin@aap.org  dlinchesky@aap.org  415-905-1711

SAN FRANCISCO – Deadly diseases are making a comeback. Pertussis, or whooping cough, has killed nine infants this year in California, and outbreaks of measles and Hib meningitis have struck U.S. communities in the past three years.

At the heart of all these outbreaks: Parents who have chosen not to vaccinate their children.

Paul Offit, MD, FAAP, a noted vaccine expert and vocal critic of the anti-vaccine movement, will trace the history of vaccine fears in America during a plenary address at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference & Exhibition in San Francisco Monday, Oct. 4. In his talk, scheduled for approximately 11:50 a.m. PT at the Moscone Center, Dr. Offit will highlight:

• The origins of religious and philosophical exemptions to vaccines in the U.S.;
• The impact of those exemptions on vaccine rates and the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases;
• The delicate balance between individual freedoms and societal good.

“Parents are bombarded with false stories about the dangers of vaccines, and the result is that some are backing away from vaccinating their children,” said Dr. Offit. “This is tragic, because it leaves children vulnerable to deadly diseases, and it lowers the immunity of the entire community.”

The pertussis epidemic in California is just the latest example of a disease that has taken a foothold thanks to low immunization rates. In 2008, 11 children around San Diego were infected with measles after an unvaccinated child returned home from Switzerland with the infection. In 2009, five children in Minnesota contracted Hib meningitis – a vaccine-preventable infection – and one died. Several cases and at least two deaths were also reported in other states.

“We are at a crossroads,” said Dr. Offit. “If population immunity continues to break down, the door will open wider to diseases that we thought had been vanquished by vaccines.”

A co-inventor of a rotavirus vaccine, Dr. Offit’s passionate advocacy for immunization has made him a frequent target of the anti-vaccine movement. His new book, “Deadly Choices: How The Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All,” will be published by Basic Books in January.

Dr. Offit is chief of infectious diseases and director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, as well as the Maurice R. Hilleman Professor of Vaccinology and professor of pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He is the author of several books, including “Autism’s False Prophets: Bad Science, Risky Medicine, and the Search for a Cure,” and “Vaccines: What You Should Know.”
Reporters wanting to attend the session should first stop by the press room (room 224/226) at the Moscone Center for media credentials.

###

*The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information, visit [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).*