

# Mom testifies that vaccine caused daughter's autism

## 5,000 FAMILIES HAVE LODGED COMPENSATION CLAIMS

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WASHINGTON - In excruciating detail, an Arizona mother Monday described severe autism and devastating health problems that plague her 12-year-old daughter and asked a court to find childhood vaccines were the cause.

The test case is being closely watched by nearly 5,000 families of autistic children who have lodged similar claims for compensation from a federal fund.

The case of Michelle Cedillo of Yuma, Ariz., is the first alleging a vaccine-autism link to be heard in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. It and eight other test cases are important because they will guide the handling of the other pending claims. Most contend that a mercury-rich preservative called thimerosal is to blame for the impaired social interaction typical of the disorder.

Should they prevail, the families will be eligible for compensation from a federal vaccine injury fund established by Congress to ensure an adequate supply of vaccines by shielding manufacturers from lawsuits. No autism claim has been paid from the fund.

Large scientific studies have found no association between autism and vaccines containing thimerosal.

Government attorney Vincent Matanoski dismissed much of what the plaintiffs are expected to present during the three-week hearing as conjecture or speculation.

Theresa Cedillo said her daughter suffered five days of fever, her temperature often spiking to 105 degrees, after receiving a measles, mumps and rubella vaccination at age 15 months.

Before that, Michelle was a happy and responsive child, her mother told the court.

Cedillo and her husband, Michael, allege thimerosal-containing vaccines weakened their daughter's immune system and prevented her body from clearing the measles virus after she was immunized. Other plaintiffs claim either thimerosal or the measles vaccine alone caused their children's autism.

The burden of proof is easier than in a traditional court. Plaintiffs have to prove only that a link between autism and the shots is more likely than not, based on a preponderance of evidence.

In 1999, the U.S. government asked vaccine manufacturers to eliminate or reduce the use of thimerosal in childhood vaccines to limit infant exposure to mercury.