

How Independent Are Vaccine Defenders?

By **Sharyl Attkisson**

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For years some parents and scientists have raised concerns about vaccine safety, including a possible link to autism and ADD. Many independent experts have sided with government officials and other scientists who say there's no possible connection. But how "independent" are they? CBS News investigative correspondent Sharyl Attkisson shares here's what she found.

They're some of the most trusted voices in the defense of vaccine safety: the American Academy of Pediatrics, Every Child By Two, and pediatrician Dr. Paul Offit.

But **CBS News** has found these three have something more in common - strong financial ties to the industry whose products they promote and defend.

The **vaccine industry gives millions to the Academy of Pediatrics** for conferences, grants, medical education classes and even helped build their headquarters. The totals are kept secret, but public documents reveal bits and pieces.

- A \$342,000 payment from Wyeth, maker of the pneumococcal vaccine - which makes \$2 billion a year in sales.
- A \$433,000 contribution from Merck, the same year the academy endorsed Merck's HPV vaccine - which made \$1.5 billion a year in sales.
- Another top donor: Sanofi Aventis, maker of 17 vaccines and a new five-in-one combo shot just added to the childhood vaccine schedule last month.

Every Child By Two, a group that promotes early immunization for all children, admits the group takes money from the vaccine industry, too - but wouldn't tell us how much.

A spokesman told **CBS News**: "There are simply no conflicts to be unearthed." But guess who's listed as the group's treasurers? Officials from Wyeth and a paid advisor to big pharmaceutical clients.

Then there's **Paul Offit, perhaps the most widely-quoted defender of vaccine safety.**

He's gone so far as to say babies can tolerate "10,000 vaccines at once."

This is how Offit described himself in a previous interview: "I'm the chief of infectious disease at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a professor of pediatrics at Penn's medical school," he said.

Offit was not willing to be interviewed on this subject but like others in this **CBS News** investigation, he has strong industry ties. In fact, he's a vaccine industry insider.

Offit holds in a \$1.5 million dollar research chair at Children's Hospital, funded by Merck. He holds the patent on an anti-diarrhea vaccine he developed with Merck, Rotateq, which has prevented thousands of hospitalizations.

And future royalties for the vaccine were just sold for \$182 million cash. Dr. Offit's share of vaccine profits? Unknown.

There's nothing illegal about the financial relationships, but to critics, they pose a serious risk for conflicts of interest. As one member of Congress put it, money from the pharmaceutical industry can shape the practices of those who hold themselves out to be "independent."

The American Academy of Pediatrics, Every Child By Two and Dr. Offit would not agree to interviews, but all told us they're up front about the money they receive, and it doesn't sway their opinions.

Today's immunization schedule now calls for kids to get 55 doses of vaccines by age 6.

Ideally, it makes for a healthier society. But critics worry that industry ties could impact the advice given to the public about all those vaccines.

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