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Dear Ms. O'Neill,

One of the most important decisions parents make to ensure their children's health is the decision to vaccinate them against potentially deadly, vaccine-preventable diseases. To do so, parents need accurate, complete information about immunizations – which they often look for online. So we were astounded when we found an article on a Discovery Company website that perpetuates dangerous myths and untruths about vaccines. We cannot understand how a company that celebrates the latest in scientific achievements would feature an article so inaccurate and wholly biased against science.

The article, "5 Things to Consider When Deciding to Vaccinate Your Child"

(<http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/family/why-shouldnt-we-vaccinate-our-children.htm>) by Josh Clark begins with the claim that medical science has already "conquered" diseases like polio and pertussis (also known as whooping cough). Polio is still endemic in parts of the world, and pertussis is killing infants here in the United States. Several states have declared epidemics of pertussis this year. Measles, too, is making a comeback, with more cases in the United States in 2011 than in 15 years. These diseases pose real threats to children who are unprotected by vaccines.

As with all medications, vaccines do carry some risks, most commonly fever and pain at the injection site. These risks are tiny compared to vaccines' benefits. But instead of an honest discussion of the facts, Josh Clark perpetuates false and misleading notions. A few errors were corrected in the second version of the article posted May 16, but we cannot understand how they ever made it through your review process. It would have been easy, for example, to learn that the vaccine that protects against measles, mumps and rubella does not and never did contain thimerosal, and thimerosal has been removed as a preservative from all other childhood vaccines in the United States, except for some influenza vaccines.

The fallacies don't stop there. Vaccines contain killed or weakened versions of viruses and bacteria; you cannot "catch" the disease from the vaccine. Josh Clark also resurrects the issue of vaccines and autism, which the scientific and medical communities have thoroughly debunked, and he suggests the only reason parents may want to vaccinate their children before they head to school is that it's "easier" than filling out the paperwork for an exemption.

Finally, his suggestion that parents delay immunizations is terribly misguided. The vaccine schedule is scientifically designed to protect children when they are most vulnerable to specific infectious diseases. Waiting until school age to vaccinate would leave infants and toddlers exposed to the very diseases that can kill them.

It is clear to us that the Discovery Company has dropped the ball in its vetting process for articles. The members of our societies work hard to protect the health and lives of children, and we believe this erroneous information does a true disservice to families and children. If your organization is presenting information on health to the public, we ask that you do a better job ensuring it is accurate. Our children's lives depend on it.

We call on the Discovery Company to produce a complete and factual presentation on the importance of immunizations. For accurate information on vaccines, we encourage you to visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines and the websites of our organizations.

American Academy of Family Physicians

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/kids/vaccines.html>

American Academy of Pediatrics www2.aap.org/immunization and www.healthychildren.org

American Academy of Physician Assistants www.aapa.org

American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians

American Medical Association

Autism Science Foundation

<http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org/autismandvaccines.html>

Children's Immunization Project at Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota

Every Child By Two www.vaccinateyourbaby.org

Families Fighting Flu

Immunization Action Coalition

Infectious Diseases Society of America <http://www.idsociety.org/Immunization/>

National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Foundation for Infectious Diseases www.nfid.org

National Meningitis Association www.nmaus.org

Oregon Pediatric Society

Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases www.pkids.org

Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society

Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

<http://vaccine.chop.edu>