

[THE INDEPENDENT]
ITALIAN COURT
REIGNITES MMR VACCINE DEBATE
AFTER AWARD OVER CHILD WITH AUTISM

by

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The controversial row surrounding alleged links between the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism is set to be reignited following a court ruling in Italy.

Judges in Rimini, north-east Italy awarded the Bocca family Euros 174,000 (£140,000) after the Italian Health Ministry conceded the MMR vaccine caused autism in their nine-year-old son Valentino. Up to 100 similar cases are now being examined by Italian lawyers and experts suggest the case could lead to other families pursuing cases.

Doctors and health experts in Britain insist the link is merely coincidental saying children who develop autism, do so around the same time the MMR jab is administered. The Department of Health says 'there is a wealth of evidence showing children who receive the MMR vaccine are no more at risk of autism than those who don't.'

But the ruling in Italy is likely to re-open a debate which first made the headlines in Britain over a decade ago when the respected medical journal The Lancet published an article in 1998, making a connection between the triple vaccine and autism. Though the author's methods were later discredited, it was enough for many families to refuse their children the jab.

Valentino Bocca was 15 months old when he received an MMR jab in 2004. His parents said the change in him, after the jab, from a healthy boy to one who was in serious discomfort, was immediate.

Luca Ventaloro the family lawyer, said yesterday: "This is very significant for Britain which uses, and has used, an MMR vaccine with the same components as the one given to Valentino. It is wrong for governments and their health authorities to exert strong pressure on parents to take children for the MMR jab while ignoring that this vaccine can cause autism and linked conditions."

The number of autism cases has risen sharply since the 1970s, with one in 64 British children affected.

It is not yet clear what the new evidence presented to the Italian courts was, but similar cases around the world could be brought.

In the UK, the Vaccine Damage Payments Unit has only paid small sums to 34 cases over the last decade and the child has to be 60 per cent disabled.

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