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Anti-MMR case hit by retraction

New claims have surfaced that the controversial medical research linking the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine with autism was flawed.

Editors of the medical journal which originally published the research, say they were wrong to publish the findings, which caused many parents around the world to withhold the vaccine.

When the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet* published a study showing a possible link between the M-M-R vaccine, autism and bowel disease thousands of parents decided not to get their children immunized.

Now new information has surfaced about the 1998 study, with the editors of *The Lancet* conceding the findings should never have been published.

"If we knew then what we knew now we certainly would not have published the part of the paper to do with M-M-R though I do believe that there remains validity to the connection between bowel disease and autism... which does need further investigation," Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet* says.

What's come to light is that lead author Dr Andrew Wakefield did not disclose he was being paid by legal aid groups on behalf of parents pursuing legal action against the manufacturers of the vaccine.

The British Government is now investigating the allegations to see whether a wider public inquiry is needed.

But the study's authors are standing by their original findings. Dr Wakefield has issued a statement saying there was no conflict of interest regarding the children and that his conclusions were verified by independent doctors.

Australian health authorities have always insisted the M-M-R vaccine is safe and effective.

"People think these diseases are something of the past but they are not," Professor David Isaacs, from the Children's Hospital at Westmead.

"If we stop immunising against measles then children will die from measles."

Despite research such as Dr Wakefield's, immunisation rates in Australia remain high.