

# AUTISM GOES TO VACCINE COURT

BY CHRISTINA HERNANDEZ  
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While his younger sister after their mother this summer, Daniel Safian, 7, lives here can play and socialize with other children. Daniel, 7, lives in a different world. One day last month, Daniel's mother said, "I printed across the world, but he cannot read these words. As a child with autism, Daniel is not an active machine to get dressed. And his mother, Rita Jones-Safian, said if Daniel goes three days without speaking, he loses hand-won skills like toilet training. As a baby, Daniel was a week-long pecker-box. Developing normally, his mother said, he began speaking at 18 months. Then, his hand-clinked, she said, after routine vaccinations when he was 18 months old. Daniel was not speaking for two months, she said, before he stopped responding to his name. When a specialist diagnosed autism a month later, Jones-Safian said, "I thought the most likely culprit was a vaccine."

three tests said they made a link between the vaccine and autism. The parents, the court is likely to set up a framework for compensation to the others.

**Vaccine preservative blamed**  
Using Michelle's story, the petitioners sketched out their theory that thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative in many vaccines and rubella vaccine, combined with the measles, mumps and rubella vaccination shot, caused the autism. The damage, they said, can lead to autism, a developmental disorder characterized by speech and often severe social impairments. In the United States, more than 3 million children each year are completely vaccinated.

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## Families seek compensation from federal trust fund, saying vaccines made their children autistic

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### QA

**What is autism?**  
Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning it affects people in a range of ways. Some children have mild symptoms, while others have severe symptoms that significantly impair their ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism is characterized by unusual behaviors. Autism is four times as likely in boys as in girls. It is routinely diagnosed between the ages of 3 and 5.

**What causes autism?**  
Scientists have been unable to determine its cause or causes, but many point to genetic factors. The parents of a child with autism have a 2 percent to 8 percent chance of having a second autistic child.

**What are the symptoms?**  
People with autism have difficulty interacting with others. They may also lose some skills and engage in repetitive behaviors. Physical ailments, like allergies, gastrointestinal disorders and sleeping disorders, are associated with autism.

**Can autism be treated?**  
There is no known cure for autism, but some therapies can improve symptoms. Medications can be prescribed. Some treatments, such as dietary changes, are controversial.

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## **The making of “Autism goes to vaccine court” by Christina Hernandez**

It was my editor's idea to localize the heated "autism court" proceedings that were going on in Washington last summer. We found a Long Island family to which we could anchor the story, and I set out to understand the confusing world of vaccine court, to navigate the science of autism and to immerse myself in the emotional rollercoaster that parents of children with autism live. I had to walk a fine line between the parent's passionate viewpoints and science's skepticism, and I hope the story succeeded in describing this complex world.

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