

**Down's babies used in vaccine experiments**  
**By Victoria MacDonald, Health Correspondent**  
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Babies and young children with Down's syndrome were used as guinea pigs by British doctors in 1960 to test an experimental vaccine for measles.

The children, who were living in institutions for the "severely subnormal", were subjected to the experiments because the doctors said it was "useful" having them in hospital where they could watch over them for adverse reactions. One of the children died seven days after being vaccinated from a common side-effect of measles, but the doctors described it as coincidental in their report.

Llewellyn Smith, Labour MP for Blaenau Gwent, said last night that he would press for an adjournment debate tomorrow. Mr Smith, who has campaigned for two years on behalf of children damaged by vaccines, said that to use mentally handicapped children as guinea pigs was "to say the least scandalous. It is totally unacceptable in any society which calls itself civilised. There must be an inquiry into how this could have happened. I do not see how it could have been justified."

Only two of the doctors who did the experiments at the Fountain Hospital in Tooting, south London, and at Queen Mary's Hospital, Carshalton, Surrey, are still alive. Dr Inez Aldous, retired in Ipswich, said: "The benefits were tremendous with these children living in very poor circumstances, and measles was a disaster."

Professor Neville Butler, of the International Centre for Child Studies, in Bristol, said: "It was neither here nor there that they were Down's syndrome children." He could not remember much about the tests except that he did not think there was more chance of a Down's syndrome child suffering a reaction than any other child. He said: "The makers of the vaccine had thought it was all right. Certainly I do not think it would be done today on children who are mentally retarded. The measles vaccine has reduced the number of children dying throughout the world and you could argue that without trials like that people would never have known what to do."

The research was uncovered in an investigation by Richard Barr, a solicitor with Dawbarns, who is representing families of children said to have been damaged by the measles, mumps and rubella combined vaccine. Mr Barr has been trying to find out what safety tests were done on the measles vaccine given to millions of children.

Dr Andrew Wakefield, of the Royal Free Hospital, London, who fears the measles vaccine can lead to children developing Crohn's disease, a serious inflammatory bowel disorder, and autism, said he was shocked by the 1960 experiment.

"This is both a practical and an ethical issue. You cannot extrapolate from brain-damaged children to normal infants," he said. "The question you have to ask is can we apply the same standards now as to then? I do not see why not."

Dr Richard Nicholson, editor of the Bulletin of Medical Ethics, said: "People try to say that you cannot apply the same ethical standards today as you could in the 1960s. You have to do research with proper safeguards in place and the safeguard was there in 1960 but it was largely ignored by doctors."

The research involved 77 children aged between one and 11. They were described by the doctors as severely subnormal "in the imbecile and idiot range". 56 of the children were given one of three live measles vaccines. The others remained unvaccinated as "controls".

Most of the children developed mild measles with fever and a rash. Nine had marked reactions including bronchopneumonia and photophobia, a reaction to light. One boy, said to be severely

mentally retarded with a history of epilepsy, died on the seventh day. A post-mortem examination revealed bronchopneumonia and appendicitis.

The results of the research led to the Medical Research Council's Vaccine Committee creating a trial of the safety and efficacy of the measles vaccine in 1963. This is seen as one of the definitive vaccine studies upon which vaccine policy is based.

The trial was arranged in 32 areas throughout Britain and involved 36,000 children from 10 months to two years of age. But adverse effects were only monitored for three weeks. Nine months after the trial began the measles vaccine was offered to all unvaccinated children.

In October 1988, the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccination was offered for the first time. The measles component was based on the 1960 and 1963 study. Although the vaccine used today is weaker than doses used on the children in 1960, researchers believe that this does not mean that it cannot cause underlying, long-term health conditions. Jackie Fletcher, who set up the organisation JABS after her son was damaged after vaccination, said: "The more I go into this the more horrific it becomes."

Gavin Smith, now 15, received the measles vaccine when he was 30 months old. When he was six he developed SSPE, a rare fatal swelling of the brain caused by persistent measles infection. His parents Yvonne and Phil, of Edlington in Doncaster, were told by Gavin's consultant that it was caused by the measles vaccine. He is totally paralysed and has already lived several years longer than expected. Mrs Smith said: "These studies are disturbing. Nobody told us then that there might be any problems."

The Department of Health refused to answer any questions on the ethics of using children with Down's syndrome to experiment on. It said the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, an independent committee which advises the Government, had looked at the measles vaccine three times in the last two years and found no evidence to question its safety.