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## **Senate votes to limit mercury in childhood vaccine**

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Jefferson City -- Immunizations for pregnant women and children ages 2 and younger could contain only trace amounts of mercury under a bill headed to Gov. Matt Blunt's desk.

The Senate voted, 29-2, Wednesday to give final approval. The House adopted the measure Tuesday.

The ban would take effect in April 2007.

Many proponents of a ban believe mercury, a preservative in vaccines, triggers autism in children.

Scientists disagree on any connection, but states nonetheless have begun limiting exposure.

"My attitude is what can it hurt to get (mercury) out?" said Sen. Norma Champion, R-Springfield, the bill's sponsor.

Originally, her legislation called for a ban on thimerosal and other mercury-based vaccines for children 6 and younger.

The age was later raised to 13 and younger, after childhood immunizations no longer are administered. However, the limit couldn't find enough support.

The limit was lowered after negotiations including Blunt's representatives and public health officials.

Nixa resident Rita Schreffler, a member of the board of the National Autism Association and the mother of two children with autism-related disorders, said Wednesday that passage of the law was "an important step in protecting Missouri's children from unnecessary exposure to a known neurotoxin," but the law doesn't go far enough.

"Older children and even adults are known to suffer adverse neurological reaction from exposure to mercury.

"Eventually we'd like to see mercury taken out of all vaccines, for people of any age. I think it's barbaric that mercury was ever injected into humans in the first place."

Champion said she was happy getting the bill passed, even if the age limit is lower than some prefer.

News-Leader reporter Kathleen O'Dell contributed to this story.

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