EDITORIAL

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Politics and health
Política y salud

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Politics refers to the art, doctrine, or practice of governing states, promoting citizen participation, and exercising power as needed to safeguard the common good within society (Wikipedia). Therefore, in matters of health, political decision-making holds particular significance, as it entails ensuring the optimal protection of population health. This requires promotional, preventive, and therapeutic actions guided by policies grounded in the best available evidence derived from scientific research, academia, medical societies, and public and private institutions. Governments compile this evidence and disseminate it through their governing bodies, ministries, or national health systems.

It is therefore concerning that one of the United States' regulatory agencies, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), together with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), has advised physicians that the use of acetaminophen (paracetamol) during pregnancy may be associated with an increased risk of autism and should consequently be avoided. This recommendation is based on a review of 46 articles conducted by Prada in 2025 and published in Environmental Health[(1)], which presents methodological limitations that undermine its reliability and clinical applicability. Moreover, the included studies are not of high quality and exhibit significant limitations that compromise their validity.

Decades of evidence contradict this assertion, as do the guidelines issued by major international obstetric organizations such as FIGO and ACOG, both of which recommend paracetamol as the safest analgesic option for pregnant women when used appropriately[(2,3)]. This is particularly relevant given that an estimated 40–65% of pregnant women use acetaminophen to manage fever or pain during pregnancy—conditions that may pose risks to both the mother and the fetus.

The most comprehensive and methodologically rigorous evidence on this topic derives from a recent Swedish study published in JAMA in 2024, which evaluated 2.4 million children born between 1995 and 2019. The study incorporated sibling-control analyses comparing children who were and were not exposed to acetaminophen in utero, a methodology that effectively adjusts for genetic and environmental factors shared within families and is considered the gold standard for mitigating confounding in observational research. This study found no association between prenatal acetaminophen exposure and subsequent autism, attention-deficit disorder, or intellectual disability in children[(4)].

In public health, and in science more broadly, therapeutic management decisions are made by evaluating the current body of evidence and considering the quality of the studies, rather than whether the findings align with a particular point of view. When new evidence emerges, recommendations are reassessed or revised accordingly. This process is fundamental to improving health care and minimizing risk. The departure of major U.S. federal health agencies from this evidence-based approach poses a potential threat to the health of Americans and, given

their international influence, to global health as well.

Therefore, it is appropriate that the aforementioned organizations, along with the World Health Organization, have sought to correct these statements, as the risks of inaction are substantial. Public health decisions must align with the consensus of experts in the field, grounded in research and scientific evidence, rather than political or ideological positions.

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