

Fear of whooping cough vaccine invites epidemic, doctors warn

By Howard Wolinsky

A nationwide epidemic of potentially deadly whooping cough is possible because of unwarranted fears about side effects from a vaccine, leading pediatricians warned vesterday.

But a critic of the whooping cough vaccine maintained that children would be safer if not-vaccinat-

Parents began questioning the vaccine's use during the last two years when attention was focused on possible salety problems. Several parents have filed multimilliondollar suits a ainst manufacturers.

Risks cited

Dr. Martin Smith of Gainsville. Ga., vice president-elect of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said at the group's annual meeting at the Hyatt Regency Chicago that, although the vaccine is not free of risks, a child has a greater chance of developing a serious problem if he contracts the disease than of developing problems because of the vaccine.

Dr. Paul Wehrle of Los Angeles, 5,000 cases of whooping cough and

academy president, said fears about the vaccine killing children or damaging their brains have led some parents to refuse immunization for their children.

Smith said confusion about the vaccine already may be taking a toll, with a possible outbreak of whooping cough in Seattle being investigated by the Centers for Disease Control.

He said the situation is worsening because of vaccine shortages. A manufacturer recently stopped production because of the costs of defending the suits. Only two drug companies still make the vaccine compared to about eight a decade

"If any more [manufacturers] drop out, we will have serious shortages," with millions of children denied protection. Smith contended.

The academy, based in suburban Elk Grove Village, has found "spot shortages" of the vaccine in 14 states, including Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Wehrle defended the vaccine's record, saving there are fewer than

about 45 deaths occur per year. compared with 265,000 cases and 7.500 deaths in 1934. He said only one child in 300,000 suffers permanent brain damage from the vac-

However, Dr. Robert Mendelsohn, an outspoken critic of the vaccine, maintains that because of side effects, children are better off without the immunization.

Scare tactic charged

The Evanston pediatrician also charged that pediatricians are drumming up fears about an epidemic as a scare tactic to protect heir own economic interests.

He said, "Vaccinations are the lifeblood of pediatrics. Without vaccines, patients wouldn't have to come into their offices."

Mendelsohn dismissed the report of an outbreak in Seattle. He said an earlier report in Maryland supposedly resulting from media reports was "a bogus epidemic."

He said most of the whoopingcough cases reported in Maryland were not confirmed in the laborato Ty or were in patients who already were immunized.