



Tuesday, 23 September 2025

Transcript: AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen on ABC News Breakfast

Subject: Paracetamol and autism

JAMES GLENDAY: Well, let's get more on one of our top stories this morning, and that is the news that has broken out of the United States over the past hour or so. Australian experts are urging caution after US President Donald Trump revealed that America's Food and Drug Administration will notify doctors that using paracetamol during pregnancy can be associated with a risk of autism. The President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Danielle McMullen, has been following this and she joins us now from Ipswich. Danielle, welcome to the program.

DR DANIELLE McMULLEN: Thank you.

GLENDAY: First of all, let's just put out the current advice in Australia. What is it for women who are pregnant?

DR McMULLEN: So, paracetamol in Australia is considered a Category A medicine, and that means that the TGA, our other regulators, have considered it safe to use in pregnancy. Of course, like all medications, we try to use as little as possible when pregnant, but certainly for pain or fever in pregnancy, the advice here in Australia still is that paracetamol is a reasonable option and a safe option for pregnant women to use.

GLENDAY: We should put this in context, because members of the Trump administration, once they got elected, vowed that they would find what was causing autism within the first five to six months or so. Given that this complex syndrome has been researched for decades, was that ever a likely goal?

DR McMULLEN: I wish science moved that fast, but that would be really ambitious time frames for, as you say, what's a really complex syndrome and tricky questions to answer. I wish we had all of the answers as to what are the causes and potential treatments for autism, and I fully support as much funding and research as can go into this condition as possible. But I don't think we're there yet. There's certainly no study that has shown that paracetamol causes autism. There are a range of studies, some which show an association, which doesn't mean cause, and some which don't show that same association. And so it's really important that we think about that science and critically analyse it before causing fear in families. And so hence why the medical community today is responding and saying, look, all medicines should be used with caution during pregnancy, but paracetamol has been widely used and is still considered a safe option.

GLENDAY: Donald Trump has gone down this path before, notably at the start of the pandemic, giving pretty rambling press conferences and then giving some medical advice in there as well. How would you like to see our chief health officers around the country and even health ministers around the country react to these statements today?

DR McMULLEN: I think our Health Minister has already reacted in that he wisely has said he'll take his health advice from clinicians and from regulators here. And so, like we did as Australia during the pandemic, we really took strong health advice from doctors, from researchers and from that medical community and our regulators. So I would encourage Australians to still do the same. Our chief health officers and medical officers

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are medical practitioners and are trained in analysing these studies and really weighing up the pros and cons, and translating that into information that's understandable by the general public. And so really encourage individuals to talk to their doctors, and in terms of listening to health advice for our health officers and our health ministers here to be listening to that health advice.

GLENDAY: Yes, that is good advice. Dr Danielle McMullen, thank you very much for joining our program this morning.

DR McMULLEN: Thank you.

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Contact: AMA Media: +61 427 209 753 media@ama.com.au



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