

Texas Sues Tylenol Makers, Claiming They Hid Autism Risks

(October 28, 2025) by Rebecca Robbins, Azeen Ghorayshi, and J. David Goodman

Words to Know

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|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. acetaminophen | 12. liability |
| 2. appellate | 13. litigation |
| 3. autism | 14. neuro- |
| 4. cite | 15. nostalgic |
| 5. conservative | 16. obstetrician |
| 6. correlation | 17. opioid |
| 7. divested | 18. pharmaceutical |
| 8. epidemiologist | 19. plaintiff |
| 9. gynecologist | 20. robust |
| 10. inconclusive | 21. spinoff |
| 11. incumbent | |

The lawsuit follows claims by President Trump that linked **acetaminophen** taken by pregnant women to **autism**, a connection that is unproven.

Texas attorney general Ken Paxton filed the suit against Johnson & Johnson, which sold Tylenol for decades, and Kenvue, the spinoff company that has sold it since 2023.

Ken Paxton, the Republican attorney general of Texas, sued the makers of Tylenol on Tuesday, claiming that the companies hid the risks of the drug on brain development of children.

The lawsuit is the latest fallout from President Trump's claim last month that use of Tylenol during pregnancy can cause autism. That link is unproven.

Mr. Paxton filed the suit against Johnson & Johnson, which sold Tylenol for decades, and Kenvue, a **spinoff** company that has sold the drug since 2023.

The Texas lawsuit claims that the companies knowingly withheld evidence from consumers about Tylenol's links to autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The suit also claims that Kenvue was created to shield Johnson & Johnson from **liability** over Tylenol.

This lawsuit is the first by a state that seizes on Mr. Trump's allegations that the use of acetaminophen products like Tylenol during pregnancy could cause neurodevelopmental disorders. The issue has been a longstanding concern among some followers of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nation's top health official, but the idea gained traction with Mr. Trump's remarks.

Kenvue has repeatedly defended Tylenol's safety and rejected Mr. Trump's claims about the drug's use during pregnancy and autism.

“We will defend ourselves against these baseless claims and will respond per the legal process,” Melissa Witt, a spokeswoman for Kenvue, said on Tuesday. “We stand firmly with the global medical community that acknowledges the safety of acetaminophen and believe we will continue to be successful in litigation as these claims lack legal merit and scientific support.”

In other **litigation**, Johnson & Johnson has said that it had always acted responsibly in warning consumers about Tylenol’s proven risk of liver damage when taken in excess.

Clare Boyle, a spokeswoman for Johnson & Johnson, said on Tuesday that the company “**divested** its consumer health business years ago, and all rights and liabilities associated with the sale of its over-the-counter products, including Tylenol (acetaminophen), are owned by Kenvue.”

Hundreds of lawsuits in state and federal courts have been filed in recent years by families who claimed that their children were diagnosed with autism or A.D.H.D. after taking Tylenol during pregnancy.

In the largest group of cases, filed in federal court, a U.S. judge in New York dismissed the lawsuits, citing a lack of reliable scientific evidence. The plaintiffs are appealing the decision, with a hearing in front of an appellate panel scheduled for Nov. 17.

For years, scientists have conducted research on a potential connection between acetaminophen and **neuro**developmental disorders, but the studies have so far produced mixed results.

Medical groups pushed back against the Trump administration’s warning in September, saying that Tylenol was the only pain reliever safe for use during pregnancy to treat high fevers. If untreated, fevers can pose serious risks to the health of the baby and the mother.

Molly Meegan, general counsel of the American College of **Obstetricians** and **Gynecologists**, said that the Texas lawsuit was “a misrepresentation” of the science. “The most **robust** studies of the last two decades have continued to demonstrate that acetaminophen does not cause autism — and that it can play a medically important role in the care ob-gyns provide to their pregnant patients,” she said.

Mr. Paxton, who is challenging Senator John Cornyn, the longtime **incumbent**, in the Republican primary next year, has been aggressive in filing litigation that aligns with Mr. Trump’s priorities. He has challenged the results of the 2020 election, sued nonprofits representing immigrants’ rights and sought to remove Democratic lawmakers from office in Texas during a battle over redistricting. Though not always successful, Mr. Paxton’s legal efforts have generated deep support for him among Texas Republicans.

Last month, the Food and Drug Administration said it was seeking to include a warning on the Tylenol label about the connection to neurodevelopmental disorders. Kenvue said it would oppose the changes, arguing that they were “not supported by the existing science.”

The Trump administration and Mr. Paxton's suit both **cite** a recent scientific review conducted by **epidemiologists** at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. That study, which evaluated existing scientific findings but did not produce new data, found evidence of a link between acetaminophen use during pregnancy and the development of autism and A.D.H.D. in childhood.

More than half of the 46 studies included in the review found a positive **correlation** between use of the drug during pregnancy and neurodevelopmental disorders in children. But scientists have cautioned that the studies do not prove that acetaminophen causes autism, which is known to be linked to a complex interplay of genetics and environmental factors.

Pregnant women who take acetaminophen may differ in important ways from those who don't, including in their genetics. One major study of nearly 2.5 million children born in Sweden found that, when accounting for the mother's genetics, there was no association between acetaminophen and neurodevelopmental disorders.

Studies by health agencies — including the F.D.A. and the European Medicines Agency — have evaluated the evidence and found that the results are **inconclusive**.

On Sunday, Mr. Trump again took up the issue on his social media platform, Truth Social. "Pregnant Women, DON'T USE TYLENOL UNLESS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY," he wrote.

The main law firm representing **plaintiffs** in the personal injury cases, Keller Postman, is also serving as outside counsel on Mr. Paxton's suit.

Those plaintiff cases must clear the high bar of showing that the drug caused neurodevelopmental disorders in children and that families should be awarded damages as a result.

But Mr. Paxton's suit pursues a different tack by arguing that Johnson & Johnson and Kenvue violated Texas law by not informing consumers of the possible risks of taking Tylenol during pregnancy.

Texas courts are often challenging for plaintiffs in personal injury cases. Mr. Paxton's decision to file the case in a **conservative**, rural county near the Louisiana border may have been a strategic move to find a court sympathetic to his case.

Mr. Paxton's suit claims that Johnson & Johnson intentionally spun off its consumer health business at least in part to shield itself from liability in the cases against Tylenol. The complaint did not provide evidence for that claim.

Johnson & Johnson announced the spinoff in 2021, and the split was finalized in 2023. Kenvue absorbed Johnson & Johnson's well-known and **nostalgic** brands like Tylenol, Band-Aid and Johnson's Baby Shampoo.

At the time, Johnson & Johnson said that it was looking to focus on its more profitable and faster-growing businesses in **pharmaceuticals** and medical devices. The company was also

facing hugely expensive lawsuits over its role in the **opioid** epidemic and over accusations that the talc once used in its baby powder had caused cancer in some customers.

Wall Street analysts did not consider Tylenol to have motivated the spinoff. The Tylenol lawsuits picked up steam in 2022.

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Activity A

Directions: Answer the following questions.

1. For medical studies, what would be considered credible evidence?
2. What are the parts of the scientific method?
3. How long should a study and/or experiment be done to determine if a medication is safe?
4. Who and what organizations are responsible for determining if medication is safe in the United States?
5. List the top five pharmaceutical companies in the world. How much does each company gross per year?
6. What organization regulates how scientists conduct experiments in the United States?
7. What are medical trials (or clinical trials)?

Activity B

Directions: Write one complex sentence for each word with red print. You should have a total of 21 sentences.

Examples of complex sentences.

1. Mrs. Washington loves walking outside when the weather is warm.
2. Because the government has shutdown, many disabled and elderly citizens will not have food to eat.
3. My teacher has never been the same since her sister died.