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Measles

March 2019

Recent headlines include:

“CDC warns about measles outbreak and importance of vaccination”

“Measles: Why it’s so deadly, and why vaccination is so vital”

“Measles outbreak showcases under-vaccination”

“Measles Outbreak: Your Questions Answered”

“Doctors urge parents to vaccinate children in wake of major measles outbreak”

We should not be seeing these headlines. Measles was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000, but scattered outbreaks have occurred in recent years. Since the beginning of 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed 159 cases of measles in 10 states—California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Oregon, Texas and Washington. Almost all the cases are unvaccinated children.

Because there is no cure, the only way to stop measles is to get the vaccine. In recent years, some parents have refused or delayed vaccinating their children out of fear or misinformation about the safety of the measles vaccine. This means there are more unvaccinated children, adolescents and adults in our communities.

The measles-mumps-rubella vaccine is extremely safe and effective. Most children will have no side effects from the vaccine. A few children will get a mild fever, rash, soreness or swelling. The measles vaccine does not cause autism. This incorrect belief was based on a 1998 study that used falsified data and was later retracted. The idea has been completely rejected by overwhelming scientific evidence.

What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious virus that spreads easily through the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs and someone nearby inhales the infected droplets. Most of the recent

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outbreaks in the U.S. have started with an unvaccinated person from the U.S. traveling to another country with measles outbreaks and bringing it back to the U.S.

Measles can cause serious respiratory symptoms, fever and rash. In some cases, especially babies and young children, it can be severe. Measles killed 110,000 people worldwide in 2017, mostly children under the age of five. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 10 children with measles gets an ear infection, which can lead to permanent deafness. One in 20 children with measles develops pneumonia and one in 1,000 develops encephalitis (brain swelling that can cause brain damage). One or two in 1,000 children who contract measles will die. In countries where measles vaccination is not routine, it is a significant cause of death, according to the World Health Organization.



Dr. Rebecca Reamy

Dr. Rebecca Reamy is the Medical Director of the Pediatric Emergency Department and the Chief of Pediatrics for The Children's Hospital at Piedmont Columbus Regional Midtown Campus. Dr. Reamy has been practicing pediatric emergency medicine for 21 years. She moved to Columbus in the summer of 2015 after practicing at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Scottish Rite. Dr. Reamy is married to Dan Cordell, with two sons Daniel, 12, and Matthew, 7.