How Measles Outbreaks Underscore Dangers of Vaccine Hesitancy in 200 Words

Population Health Sciences

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Clusters of measles outbreaks are hitting communities across the country, primarily those with low vaccination rates. After seeing dozens of cases in recent weeks, mostly in children under the age of 10, Washington declared a state of emergency.

Although the U.S. declared measles eliminated in this country in 2000, parental reluctance to vaccinate their children has contributed to its resurgence in recent years, despite consistent scientific evidence that vaccines are beneficial, effective and necessary.

Measles is a highly contagious disease and it can be particularly dangerous for infants and children because of its potential complications, such as pneumonia or encephalitis. Fortunately, the recommended two doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is 97 percent effective.

Being unvaccinated doesn't just put one child at risk, it decreases herd immunity—a safe vaccination rate that can significantly reduce the spread of infectious disease—thereby putting an entire community at greater risk for certain communicable diseases. For measles, the community vaccination rate should be at least 95 percent, but only 91.1 percent of U.S. children between the ages of 19 and 35 months received the MMR vaccine in 2017. That number dips even lower in some parts of the country.

Policymakers, health departments and providers should use the clear research and evidence to ensure parents understand the safety and value of vaccines and that children are protected. To learn more, check out PolicyLab's strategies and recommendations to reduce vaccine hesitancy, and resources on the benefits of vaccination and addressing barriers to timely immunization.

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This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategy & Communications Manager Lauren Walens.