

Measles Threat- The Resurgence of a Vaccine Preventable Disease

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Sometimes what we don't know can hurt us. In the case of vaccines, it is what some THINK they know that is hurting all of us. Prior to the measles vaccine (in 1963) there were approximately 500,000 cases and 500 deaths REPORTED per year from measles, with epidemics every 2-3 years. The actual number of cases was estimated at 3-4 million per year. That was a lot of disease with really sick kids! Fortunately since the start of measles vaccination availability in the late 1960's, measles cases have dropped dramatically and by early 2000 we had a record low annual rate of 37 cases. Most cases now are "imported" from outside of the United States which initiates a public health response and notification of air travel contacts to seek medical attention due to exposure.

Unfortunately, false information about autism, side effects and general distrust of vaccines has led to more and more people opting out of getting their shot. This "anti-vax" movement is driven by fear, complacency, and sophisticated (albeit passionate) dissemination of misinformation and misrepresentation of facts. In fact so many people are "opting out" of vaccines that the World Health Organization has recently declared "vaccine hesitancy" (the unwillingness or reluctance to get vaccinated) one of the 10 biggest global health threats of 2019. Right up there with Ebola and antibiotic resistance!

What is the result of vaccine hesitancy? Quite simply, the return of these horrible diseases. Currently we are seeing yet another measles outbreak in the US, largely attributable to pockets of unvaccinated children who easily spread the virus. St. Clair County is a vulnerable community as well. We have only about 70% of our children fully immunized against measles by the age of 5. In addition our "waiver" rates for school age children (parents who "opt out" of vaccinating their children for non-medical purposes) is between 5-17% depending on schools district. Some individual schools have waiver rates as high as 26%!

One thing I can say about parents that fail to vaccinate their children, most do not wish harm on their children. In fact they would say they are protecting them by these decisions. Although the desire to protect our children is admirable, doing so based on erroneous opinions puts all of us in harm's way. The "reasons" people base their oppositions to vaccines in NOT consistent with what we know from decades of research, science and surveillance. There is no conspiracy to harm a person with a vaccine, in fact the exact opposite is true! Vaccines save lives, and a fully vaccinated community protects each other. If you are not convinced, please seek out balanced reliable information. A couple of good sources are "I Vaccinate" <https://ivaccinate.org/answering-your-questions/> or the Alliance for Immunization in Michigan (AIM) <http://www.aimtoolkit.org/health-care> . OR come in and speak to one of our expert Immunization Nurses. Let's work together to make St. Clair County a healthier community, and one that is less vulnerable to vaccine preventable diseases!

Yours in health,

Annette Mercatante, MD, MPH
Medical Health Officer
St. Clair County Health Department