

US measles outbreak spreads to fourteen states

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday confirmed 18 new cases of measles in the US, bringing the total number of people infected with the disease to 102, in 14 states.

Measles cases have now been reported in Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah and Washington, according to the CDC. On January 26, when the CDC issued an advisory, the virus had only spread to six states besides California.

“This is not a problem with the measles vaccine not working. This is a problem of the measles vaccine not being used,” said Dr. Anne Schuchat, assistant surgeon general and director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, during a news conference Thursday.

Of the 34 people infected with measles for whom the California Department of Public Health had vaccination records, only five had vaccines, while one received just the first dose. National trends have confirmed this pattern, according to Dr. Schuchat.

On Monday, a daycare center at Santa Monica High School in Southern California was closed and more than a dozen infants were placed on 21-day quarantine after a baby was found to have measles. The child was under a year old and too young to be vaccinated. Los Angeles County health officials ordered the “infant room” at the daycare center to be closed indefinitely. Among students at the high school, 7 percent have waivers exempting them from the measles vaccine, while district-wide, 11.5 percent have waivers citing personal or religious beliefs.

Last year, the United States saw the highest number of reported measles cases in 20 years, with 644 cases as part of 20 separate outbreaks. The spread of the virus

was related to a massive measles outbreak in the Philippines.

Measles is a highly contagious and airborne disease that can linger in the air long after an infected person has left a room. According to the CDC, one infected person will spread the disease on average to 18 other people. About one to two people out of every 1,000 infected will die.

In the decade leading up to the 1963 licensure of the measles vaccine, the US suffered an average of 549,000 cases of measles and 495 deaths every year, with the number of unreported cases estimated to be 3 to 4 million, according to the CDC.

In 2000, the disease was proclaimed to be nearly eradicated in the US, but has since made a comeback. From 2001 to 2011, a total of 911 cases were reported, averaging 62 cases a year.

Over the years, the number of cases has risen. In 2014, the CDC reported 644 cases of the measles, and more than 100 cases have been reported this year alone.

“Outbreaks of measles most commonly occur in communities with pockets of persons who were unvaccinated because of philosophic or religious beliefs,” the CDC said in a statement. “Pockets of unvaccinated persons also occur in states with high vaccination coverage, highlighting the importance of state health departments assessing measles susceptibility at the local level.”

In 2000, the world rate of children who had received at least one vaccination before their first birthday was estimated to be 73 percent, according to the World Health Organization. By 2013 the rate grew to 84 percent, leading measles deaths to drop by 75 percent from an estimated 544,200 in 2000 to 145,700 in 2013. On average, 400 people die every day from measles.

Between 2000 and 2013, the WHO estimated that

15.6 million measles deaths were avoided because of the vaccine, a number roughly equal to the combined populations of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and San Francisco.

Dr. Anne Schuchat told a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee this week that “measles are literally a plane ride away” and when people are not vaccinated, the disease “has the chance to spread.” She added, “Vaccines save lives and are the best way for parents to protect their children from vaccine preventable diseases.”



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