

# Measles outbreak continues to expand across the US

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6 March 2024

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Measles (Rubeola)* page (updated biweekly), as of February 29, 2024, a total of 41 measles cases had been reported by 16 states: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington.

The largest ongoing outbreak continues in Florida, with Broward County the epicenter of the outbreak. A seventh child at the Manatee Bay Elementary School was diagnosed with measles last week. Two other cases in the county had no ties to the school and another in Polk County involved an adult with a travel-related diagnosis, raising the total number of measles cases in Florida to 10.

There have been three cases reported in Michigan, two this week, all in unvaccinated individuals who had recently traveled internationally and are believed to have contracted the disease abroad. There is no evidence of spread within the state, and the three cases are not believed to be related.

The two new cases occurred in the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, in Wayne County, and in Ypsilanti, in adjoining Washtenaw County. Both cases were in adults who visited emergency rooms and urgent care facilities, with the infected person in Dearborn visiting a pharmacy as well.

Several hundred people could have been exposed to the measles virus, including all the health care workers at the four facilities visited, and the staff of the pharmacy. Contact tracing has found most of those exposed at the health care facilities, and was able to narrow down those exposed to 10 people who were not vaccinated, but the number exposed at the pharmacy, inside a CVS drug store, is unknown and probably untraceable.

Michigan has had a sharp decline in vaccination coverage for measles in recent years. Coverage with the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine for children

aged 4-6 fell from 89.4 percent in 2017 to 84 percent in 2022. In Washtenaw County, the coverage for younger children 19-35 months, fell from 90 percent in 2017 to only 81 percent in 2022.

Although the total number of infections nationwide may seem small, it bears noting that before the COVID pandemic, the annual number of measles infections across the US had been gaining momentum (1,274 cases documented in 2019). This underscores the salutary effect the efforts undertaken to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in the first two years of the pandemic had on the spread of the highly contagious measles. In 2020, only 13 individuals developed measles across eight jurisdictions. In 2021, there were 49 measles infections and in 2022 a total of 121 measles cases, in large part due to a community outbreak in central Ohio, with 85 locally acquired measles cases. And in 2023, there were 58 across 20 jurisdictions. At the current pace, 2024 may be the largest measles outbreak experienced in the US during the COVID pandemic.

The current trends show the dangers posed by the government's abdication of the responsibility to maintain an actively engaged public health infrastructure. This has led to the promotion of anti-scientific misinformation campaigns by reactionary and fascist groups who are downplaying the dangers posed by respiratory infections, leading to a decline in childhood immunization and resurgence of disease, specifically measles.

This was particularly evident in the actions of Harvard-educated anti-COVID vaccine quack Dr. Joseph Ladapo, Florida's surgeon general (who might be better described as Florida's chief executive for spreading diseases). He sent a letter to parents and guardians of the students at Manatee Bay Elementary School. Disregarding all previous public health recommendations to have unvaccinated children and individuals isolate at home after exposure to measles, Ladapo wrote, "Due to the high

immunity rate in the community, as well as the burden on families and educational cost of healthy children missing school, the department of health is deferring to parents or guardians to make decisions about school attendance.”

Ladapo’s comments were met with sharp rebukes from the infectious disease experts and epidemiologists for putting the lives of children in danger. He has been playing fast and loose with the use of the term “high immunity rates” among school-aged children. In Florida, rates of vaccination of kindergartners have fallen to 90 percent, when at least 95 percent vaccination rates are required to take advantage of herd immunity against this highly infectious disease. Also absent from the letter was the call to parents to get their children vaccinated, which helps guard against infection even 72 hours after the initial exposure.

The rationale for isolation, just as with COVID or influenza, is simple; stop the forward transmission of the disease so that others don’t contract the disease. The virus that causes measles has a very long incubation period. It is also one of the most contagious pathogens known, which is why a very high herd immunity through vaccination is required to protect those who are immunocompromised or unable to take the vaccine for various medical reasons.

Prior to the introduction of the first measles vaccine in the 1960s, the US used to experience upwards of three to four million measles cases each year and hundreds of measles-related deaths. Once the mass vaccination campaigns were implemented, it took only three decades for the US to declare in 2000 that measles had been eliminated, a significant advance in public health.

Also, across the globe, prior to the measles vaccines, annual cases numbered 135 million, while 6 million, mostly children, died from the disease. Yet, the vaccination efforts were so successful that the World Health Organization estimates the measles vaccines averted 56 million deaths across the globe in the first two decades of the 21st century.

Given this history, the current global surge in measles cases and deaths amid the COVID pandemic means we are seeing a rapid reversal of these gains. It stands as an exposure of capitalism’s advanced state of decay.

Dr. Peter Hotez, a vaccine scientist and pediatrician at the Baylor College of Medicine, who has been viciously attacked by the right wing and anti-vaccine groups, wrote an important opinion piece on January 9, 2020, when scientists in China were just identifying the novel coronavirus, on the issue of not vaccinating children for measles.

Hotez wrote, “Vaccines prevent diseases, and being unvaccinated carries a risk. Last year (2019), the World Health Organization ranked vaccine hesitancy, a ‘reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines,’ among the top 10 health threats worldwide, alongside Ebola, HIV, and drug-resistant infections.”

He then made the comparison between those vaccinated for measles and those who weren’t. Hotez noted that if 10,000 people received the MMR vaccine, there would be three fever-related seizures, 0.4 cases of abnormal blood clotting, and 0.035 allergic reactions (or 1 in a quarter million). Also, the MMR vaccines do NOT cause autism.

However, if 10,000 children were allowed to contract the virus that causes measles because they weren’t vaccinated, approximately 2,000 would need hospitalization, 1,000 could expect ear infections with potential for permanent hearing loss, 500 children would get pneumonia, 10 to 30 would die, 10 would develop encephalitis (brain infection/inflammation), and there would be several cases of abnormal blood clotting.

Recent research has also shown that a measles infection can inflict lasting harm on the immune system, weakening it to a point that those infected are left vulnerable for several years to other pathogens. The measles virus can injure the cells that make the necessary antibodies that help fight off these infections. The effect has been called “immune amnesia.”

Measles, COVID, syphilis, cholera and other diseases that have reappeared are tell-tale signs of a diseased social system for which a diagnosis has been made by the Trotskyist movement. The necessary treatment is the eradication of capitalism through social revolution. Only then can the working class address these urgent social needs on an international basis.



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