

Script – Print – There’s nothing catchy about getting the measles

There’s a misperception that measles is a thing of the past.

Not so.

Measles was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000 but is seeing a resurgence in 2024. As of March 22, there have been 64 cases across the U.S. – compared with 58 in all of 2023. The cases have appeared in at least 17 states so far, including Illinois and Michigan.

The cause of the increase is two-fold – the number of people who are unvaccinated has increased and the rise in international travel to destinations such as Britain, Austria and the Philippines, where outbreaks have occurred.

According to Alissa Bartel, a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare, there’s no reason to be concerned yet. “I think it’s always good for parents to be aware, be educated and not alarmed, but know that it is possible, especially in those kids who are at highest risk,” she says.

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. It spreads when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. That person can spread measles to others even before knowing they have the disease — from four days before developing the measles rash through four days afterward.

Symptoms include a high fever, cough, runny nose and a rash that starts at the top of the head and travels down the trunk to the lower extremities. Complications can lead to pneumonia, swelling of the brain and even death.

Measles can affect anyone but is most common in children.

“The most vulnerable of developing measles would be those who are not vaccinated; so kids under 5 years old or any child who has not chosen to be vaccinated, also those who are receiving chemotherapy or any medications that might make them immunocompromised,” says Bartel. “Also, pregnant women are very high risk, not only for themselves if they haven’t been vaccinated, but also for the child that they’re carrying.”

The best way to prevent getting sick with the measles and spreading it to others is from the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine.

“We’ve had so many vaccines that have helped us to drive so many serious illnesses and diseases away,” says Bartel. “However, we are seeing a lot of them emerge again. It’s important for us to educate our patients on vaccines, not only for ourselves, but to protect others who can’t receive vaccines.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend children get their first MMR dose between the ages of 12-15 months. The second dose is between ages 4-6. Teenagers and adults require only one dose and should get it as soon as possible.

According to the CDC, two doses of MMR vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles, and one dose is roughly 93% effective.

For parents experiencing vaccination hesitancy, Bartel recommends having a conversation with your family physician. Experts stress it’s important to eliminate potential barriers such as cost. Children can be

vaccinated for free through private insurance or the Vaccines for Children Program, a federally funded, state administered program that provides free vaccines to eligible children ages 18 and younger.

Some parents may not realize the potential seriousness of their young ones contracting measles. The World Health Organization reports that the measles vaccination prevented 56 million deaths between 2000 and 2021. An estimated 128,000 people died from measles in 2021 – mostly children under the age of 5.

“Open the conversation about vaccines and vaccine hesitancy and then also know that you can trust your provider. They know what's best for your children,” she says. “They can also point you to really good resources, trusted resources. If you like to read about things and make really educated decisions, we can empower our patients to do that.”

For more information on the measles, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).