

Ebel: We can Prevent the Return of Measles in Licking County

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Measles cases are on the rise across the globe, including the U.S., where the virus was declared eliminated in 2000.

Why is measles making a comeback? In some hard-hit countries, it is due to war, civil unrest, or other barriers to preventive healthcare access. But in the U.S., it is spreading due to unvaccinated international travelers who become infected and return to their communities and infect other unvaccinated people.

Measles virus spreads through coughing and sneezing, and it is so contagious that if one person has it, up to 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected.



Joe Ebel (Photo: Submitted photo)

The symptoms of measles generally appear about seven to 14 days after a person is infected. Symptoms typically start with a high fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. Three to five days after symptoms begin, a rash breaks out. It usually begins as flat red spots that appear on the face at the hairline and spread downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. Small raised bumps may also appear on top of the flat red spots. The spots may become joined together as they spread from the head to the rest of the body. When the rash appears, a person's fever may spike to more than 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

Measles can cause serious health complications, especially in children younger than five years of age. About one in four people in the U.S. who get

measles will be hospitalized, one out of every 1,000 people with measles will develop brain swelling – which could lead to brain damage – and one or two out of 1,000 people with measles will die, even with the best care. People at high risk for severe illness and complications from measles include infants and children under five, adults over 20, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems, such as from leukemia and HIV infection.

Some parents worry that vaccines may cause autism, however, many rigorous studies show that there is no link between autism and the MMR vaccine or thimerosal, a preservative only used in multidose vials of flu vaccines.

The best protection against measles is the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. The measles vaccine is very effective, with two doses of measles vaccine being about 97% effective at preventing measles if exposed to the virus. One dose is about 93% effective. MMR vaccine provides long-lasting protection against all strains of measles. Your child needs two doses of MMR vaccine for best protection with the first dose at 12 through 15 months of age and the second dose at 4 through 6 years of age.

Public health promotes disease prevention, and no disease prevention strategy has been more successful at preventing illness and increasing life spans than vaccinations. That is why I strongly recommend that all parents talk to their healthcare provider, or the health department, to ensure their children are fully protected against measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Submitted by Licking County Health Commissioner, Joe Ebel, R.S., M.S., M.B.A.

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