

Parents, protect your kids as measles outbreaks spread

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(HealthDay)—As measles outbreaks spread across the United States,

there are a number of things parents need to know, a leading pediatricians' group says.

The most important is to make sure your children are fully protected against the [disease](#), which can be deadly, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advised. Only the measles vaccine can do that.

The United States is in the middle of a record year for measles cases. Last week, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the number of [measles cases](#) has reached 695—the highest level since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000.

Outbreaks are occurring across the country, with one of the largest ones playing out in New York City, where 61 new cases were reported last week. Los Angeles County has also declared a [measles outbreak](#), with quarantine orders issued to more than 200 students and employees at the University of California, Los Angeles, and California State-Los Angeles because they may have been exposed to the highly contagious disease.

The ongoing outbreaks have occurred as some parents refuse or delay immunizing their children out of unfounded concern about safety of the measles vaccine. The result is more unvaccinated children, teens and adults.

Not only are [unvaccinated children](#) more susceptible to getting measles, they can spread it to others. Most of the recent flare-ups in the United States have started with an unvaccinated person traveling to a country with a measles outbreak and bringing the disease back home, according to the AAP.

The group emphasized that the [measles vaccine](#) is extremely safe, though it can cause mild side effects, including pain or swelling at the injection site and a fever that lasts a day or two.

But the risk of serious harm is small, and getting vaccinated is much safer than getting the measles, AAP noted.

The disease can cause serious complications such as pneumonia, infection of the brain (encephalitis) and even death. Before the vaccine, the disease claimed 450 lives a year, on average, most of them healthy children, according to AAP figures.

The vaccine is highly effective, but there are rare cases of vaccinated people getting measles.

People who received only one dose of the vaccine—the recommendation until 1989—may be at risk for the disease. The second dose of vaccine increases protection to more than 95%, according to AAP.

If you're not sure if you or your children have been fully vaccinated, talk to your doctor.

The AAP, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Family Physicians all recommend children first receive the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine at 12 to 15 months of age, and again at 4 to 6 years of age.

Children can receive the second dose earlier as long as it is at least 28 days after the first dose, according to the AAP.

A combination vaccine called MMRV contains both MMR and chickenpox vaccines. It's an option for some children ages 12 months to 12 years.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [measles vaccination](#).

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