

Measles anti-vaccination movement is life-threatening



Worldwide, measles infects about 20 million people annually and causes almost 200 000 deaths, primarily in young children, of which about one in five will be hospitalised.

There is currently a global resurgence of measles after years of progress in fighting the disease. Measles is a serious and highly contagious viral infection and not the “relatively harmless” childhood disease that some believe it to be.

It can cause a very high temperature of up to 40°C, debilitating or fatal complications, including encephalitis (an infection that leads to swelling of the brain), severe diarrhoea and dehydration, pneumonia, ear infections and permanent vision loss. Babies and young children suffering from malnutrition and weak immune systems are particularly vulnerable to complications and death.

Measles is also highly contagious for several days after the rash has appeared and is mainly spread by coughing and by touching items contaminated by infected droplets.

Yet some people, many influenced by celebrities, campaign against vaccination with fatal results. Some claim that MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccinations can be linked to autism, even though the research that initially suggested this link has since been widely discredited.

Why measles cases have been spiking globally

Although reports show that over 21 million lives have been saved through measles

immunisations since 2000, reported cases of infection have increased worldwide by more than 30% from 2016 because of gaps in vaccination coverage. Complacency about the disease, lack of availability of vaccines in Third World countries and the spreading of false information are contributing factors.

For several years, global coverage with the first dose of the measles vaccine has remained at 85%, while 95% is needed to prevent outbreaks. Second dose coverage is only 67%, leaving many people susceptible to infection.

Availability of measles vaccines in South Africa

According to the Department of Health, great strides have been made to improve primary healthcare despite enormous challenges.

Local clinics and community centres provide free vaccinations for all children, yet many patients complain that vaccinations are not always available in rural or even in urban areas.

Prevention through vaccination

The best way to protect your children against measles is to ensure that they are vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella with the MMR vaccination. Doctors recommend that all children should get two doses of the MMR vaccination – the

first at 12 to 15 months and the second at four to five years of age.

Scientists in the United States and other countries have exhaustively studied the effects of the MMR vaccination and have found that it is completely safe and effective at preventing all three diseases mentioned.

Medihelp members

The majority of Medihelp's benefit options offers benefits for the full schedule of standard child immunisations up to seven years at Dis-Chem/Clicks pharmacy clinics as part of members' additional insured benefits. **é**

Sources:

<https://measlesrubellainitiative.org/anti-vaccination-movement/>
<https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/immunization>
<https://datasocietydecisionmakingfall2018.wordpress.com/2018/11/18/the-prevalence-of-measles>
https://www.who.int/immunization/programmes_systems/vaccine_hesitancy/en

More info on updated stats is available in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report as of November 29 2018 and in WHO's Weekly Epidemiological Record from November 30 2018.