Germany mulls fines to boost measles vaccination rates

May 5 2019, by Frank Jordans

In this Wednesday, May 23, 2018 file photo, German Health Minister Jens Spahn arrives for the weekly cabinet meeting of the German government at the chancellery in Berlin. Jens Spahn is proposing fines for parents of school-age children who haven't been vaccinated for measles. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)

Germany's health minister is proposing fines for parents of school-age

children who haven't been vaccinated for measles amid concern that the highly contagious and potentially deadly disease could make a comeback.

In an interview published Sunday with German weekly Bild am Sonntag, minister Jens Spahn said parents who can't prove their children have been vaccinated for measles should have to pay up to 2,500 euros ($2,790).

The minister also proposed that children without measles vaccinations be banned from going to daycare facilities, to protect others who are too young or medically unable to receive a measles immunization.

Compulsory medical procedures, including vaccinations, are a politically sensitive issue in Germany and it's unclear whether Spahn's proposal, which has yet to be discussed by Cabinet, will be implemented.

But worries that a disease once thought under control could re-emerge as a major threat has experts calling for vaccinations to be stepped up. The head of the German Medical Association, Frank Ulrich Montgomery, on Sunday welcomed Spahn's proposal, telling Germany's RND media group that it was "an important step at the right time."

Germany had 203 reported cases of measles in the first 10 weeks of 2019, more than twice as many as in the same period last year but fewer than in 2017. Neighboring Switzerland last week reported two adult deaths from measles this year: one in an unvaccinated man of about 30 and another in a man of about 70 whose immune system had been compromised by cancer.

Experts generally say if more than 95% of the population is properly immunized, measles cannot spread easily and is effectively contained. But pockets of unvaccinated children or adults can cause flare-ups, as

has recently been the case in the United States , which has over 700 cases this year in an outbreak that has not been halted.

According to the World Health Organization, Europe as a whole had 82,596 cases of measles last year and 72 measles deaths. Most of those infections—53,218—were recorded in Ukraine, where an armed conflict with separatists is hurting medical care in its eastern regions.

Popular European tourist destinations such as France and Italy had more than 2,400 measles cases each from March 2018 to February 2019, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, an EU agency. Greece had more than 1,400 measles cases and Britain reported over 900 during that time.

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