

Resurgence of measles in US brings children pain and suffering

May 7 2014, by Anne Dillon

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. is seeing the largest outbreak of measles in decades. In 2000 the disease was considered eliminated from the country thanks to vaccines, but a combination of frequent international travel and a trend against vaccinating children has led to its resurgence.

"I've seen a lot of measles outbreaks in developing countries where vaccines aren't available. I've stood by children's bedsides and cared for them as they suffered. It is heartbreaking to see these children suffer from a disease that is preventable," said Nadia Qureshi, MD, pediatric infectious disease specialist at Loyola University Health System.

"We are seeing a rise in children in the U.S. with measles because international travel has become so common. People bring it back from endemic areas and because it's highly contagious. If your child is not vaccinated, they are at risk."

Measles is caused by a virus and there is no specific treatment for the infection. This extremely contagious infection is spread person to person through airborne droplets and can live in the air for up to two hours. Most infected people don't immediately know they are contagious because the characteristic rash doesn't appear until four days after infection. Initial symptoms include:

- Cough
- Fever

- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Feeling run-down

After a few days, the patient may notice tiny white spots in the mouth. After that, a rash will break out on the face that runs down the body and there will be an extremely high fever.

"Many people think it's just a virus and my child will get better. Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. This virus can make your child miserable and can lead to serious complications and even death," Qureshi said.

Youngest children are most at risk, she said, but anyone can develop serious, even deadly, complications, such as pneumonia, ear infections, diarrhea leading to dehydration and encephalitis, which is an inflammation of the brain.

"We don't have a specific treatment and can only address the symptoms of the infection. But we do have a very effective vaccine that can prevent the virus. Children in the U.S. usually get two doses of the vaccine. After the first dose 95 percent are protected and 98 percent are protected after the second. It is a safe vaccine that can protect [children](#) from a potentially deadly disease," Qureshi said.

According to Qureshi, even with a vaccinated community about 1-2 percent of that population is still at risk. Since the virus was considered eliminated from the U.S. for nearly a decade, many physicians have never seen an actual case of [measles](#) and may have a hard time diagnosing it.

"Vaccine rates were so good in this country that many physicians have seen it in books or photos but no live cases. This can make it difficult to

diagnose and people can be walking around with the contagious [virus](#) not even knowing it. The best way to keep your family safe is to vaccinate," Qureshi said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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