Pediatric Infectious Disease Experts Urge Vaccination as Measles Outbreak Continues

ARLINGTON, Va. (February 5) – As physicians, scientists, and other medical professionals dedicated to treating and preventing infections in children, the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS) remains extremely concerned about the current measles outbreak as it continues to unfold.

It has become clear that we are in the midst of a larger, very disturbing trend. Despite the fact that measles was eradicated from the United States 15 years ago, this country had 644 measles cases in 2014, more than in any year since 1994. 2015 is now on pace to well exceed that number.

The measles vaccine is a victim of its own success. Vaccination was so effective at eliminating this disease, and many other diseases, that younger generations do not appreciate or understand the severity of vaccine-preventable diseases. Instead, the focus now often lies on unfounded, disproven and discredited concerns regarding the safety of the vaccine. We know that parents want the very best for their children, and this includes keeping them safe from serious infections. It is a tragedy that some parents, often because of misinformation they may have received from friends, colleagues, or the Internet, are putting their children and others in harm’s way by refusing to vaccinate.

The current measles outbreak, which has now affected more than 100 people and will likely continue to spread, was entirely preventable. As long as approximately 95 percent of a population is vaccinated, a potential outbreak from measles will be halted in its tracks. Most states exceed this level of coverage, in part due to school vaccination requirements, but an increasing number of states have regions where vaccination coverage falls well below this level. This is in large part due to personal belief exemptions or religious exemptions that allow parents, misled by false information, to avoid vaccinating their children.

States with areas where vaccination rates are lower can look to Mississippi, where strong immunization requirements have maintained high vaccine coverage levels among children. As PIDS President David W. Kimberlin, MD, FPIDS, told The New York Times this week, “That kind of strong approach is helpful for the health of children in America. I believe that that should be something we all work toward, that we all hold in the highest of value in terms of our prioritization.”

Simply put: vaccines are safe, vaccines are effective, vaccines save lives. Children are being harmed by the growing trend of vaccine refusal. We strongly urge any parent who has a concern about the safety of a vaccine, including the MMR vaccine, to discuss these concerns with their child’s medical provider as soon as possible. Similarly, we encourage all primary care providers to actively engage all parents in the discussion about vaccines, provide clear messaging about their safety and efficacy, and be transparent about the minimal risks. This outbreak can be stopped, and future outbreaks prevented, with adequate vaccine coverage.

About PIDS

PIDS membership encompasses leaders across the global scientific and public health spectrum, including clinical care, advocacy, academics, government, and the pharmaceutical industry.
From fellowship training to continuing medical education, research, regulatory issues and guideline development, PIDS members are the core professionals advocating for the improved health of children with infectious diseases both nationally and around the world, participating in critical public health and medical professional advisory committees that determine the treatment and prevention of infectious diseases, immunization practices in children, and the education of pediatricians. For more information, including links to additional reliable sources of information about immunization, visit http://www.pids.org.