

**GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD**

## Outbreak of measles was preventable

It seems likely that public health officials in Oregon and Washington state will be dealing with the current measles outbreak at least to the end of February, and possibly longer.

That's because the symptoms for this highly contagious disease typically don't appear for seven to 14 days, and infected people are contagious days before the appearance of the first symptoms — a high fever, coughing, a runny nose and red, watery eyes. The rash that is characteristic of measles only shows up later, typically beginning around the ears.

And the measles is highly contagious: The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 9 out of every 10 unprotected people who are exposed to the virus will contract the disease. The virus is airborne, spread through the coughs and sneezes of infected people.

All of which goes to explain why we would be very surprised indeed if the one confirmed case of measles in Multnomah County turns out to be the last one in Oregon.

That Oregon case, as you probably know by now, goes along with nearly three dozen cases that have been reported in Washington's Clark County, just across the Columbia River from Portland. Consider some of the spots that have been linked to the outbreak: Portland International Airport, for example, or the IKEA store near the airport. No one ever goes to those places.

Measles isn't the minor irritant you might recall from your youth: The disease makes people, to use a technical term, very sick. Children under 5 and adults over 20 are more likely to get serious complications from the measles, including ear infections, diarrhea and pneumonia. In all, 1 of every 1,000 children with measles will develop encephalitis (swelling of the brain). The CDC says for every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die.

And almost all of this suffering is unnecessary.

The measles vaccine is 97 percent effective against the virus, and if enough people are vaccinated, something called "herd immunity" kicks in, helping to prevent an outbreak even if someone comes down with the disease. As it turns out, the Vancouver area (ground zero for this outbreak) has a vaccination rate (66 percent) that is considerably less than the 93 percentage rate required for herd immunity to kick in.

Can you identify another state in the Pacific Northwest that has relatively low immunization rates?

Of course you can. The Oregon Health Authority says the vaccination rate for the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine, which includes protection against measles, was 88 percent in 2017, less than the 93 percent level required for herd immunity.

One of the reasons why parents may be reluctant to get their children vaccinated is because they've fallen prey to the vast amount of misinformation surrounding vaccines.

Here are the facts: Vaccines do not cause autism. The study that placed this canard into motion (and into the online realm, where it's bounced around for decades) was thoroughly debunked more than 20 years ago.

Also, the measles vaccine does not contain mercury. It is true that some vaccines contain mercury as a preservative, but it's not the kind of mercury that's bad for you — it's the kind of mercury that the body can eliminate readily. In any event, in the case of the MMR vaccine, the mercury issue is a nonstarter; the vaccine does not include any mercury.

Seizures induced by vaccinations do occur, but they are rare and don't have lasting consequences. A recent study noted in The Oregonian found out of 10,000 children who received their MMR and varicella vaccines for the first time, four had that reaction.

We're paying the price now as a society for our general inability to separate scientific fact from fiction. We fear some of our children may wind up paying an especially dear price.



## Oregon must build for wildfires

In these long, dark days of winter, wildfires may seem a distant memory. But given the last few years of record-setting wildfire disasters in Oregon and neighboring states, now is no time to forget the risks we face.

Today's wildfires are more disastrous for a variety of reasons — a warming climate, a century of fire suppression and fuel accumulation, and because we are putting more people and homes in harm's way. Across the country, development is fastest in areas with wildfire potential, making future disasters more likely.

Fortunately, a decade of research, post-fire analyses and laboratory experiments have led to new science about how to avoid such disasters and build wildfire-resilient communities. It starts with where and how we build homes.

A few simple, affordable modifications to a home's roof, walls, windows, deck and landscaping can be the difference between the home's survival and loss during a wildfire. For example, home survival increases when built with ember-resistant, finer mesh attic vents, noncombustible gutters and fire-resistant decking. Maintaining a noncombustible landscaping zone immediately around the home can reduce the likelihood of embers igniting the home.

Where homes are spaced closer together, additional strategies become necessary to avoid home-to-home ignition, such as using noncombustible siding and tempered glass windows. Wildfire hazard maps can help land use planners and elected officials determine where to implement such wildfire-resis-

tant building standards.

A study released recently by Headwaters Economics found the cost of constructing a home to such standards was roughly the same as a typical home. Using wildfire-resistant materials can have added benefits such as reduced maintenance and longer lifespans.

This year, Oregon will consider amending its State Building Code to allow local jurisdictions the option of requiring wildfire-resistant construction in high hazard areas. The proposed code, derived from international standards and using the best available science, would allow cities and counties to decide whether and where to implement wildfire building regulations.

Oregon would be wise to allow communities to require wildfire-resistant construction, as Washington and California have already done. To be most effective, mitigation must be mandatory at the community scale in areas of high wildfire hazard. Since implementation takes time, the sooner these code amendments are adopted, the better.

Already, Ashland, Bend, Sisters and Wasco County are exploring such requirements through expert input as part of the national Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire program. But unless the state building code is amended, no Oregon community could adopt wildfire-resistant building regulations.

Too often, we believe the unthinkable will not happen to our community, but such willful blindness does us all a disservice. When flammable homes are built in wildfire-prone areas,

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taxpayers end up shouldering the burden, economies are disrupted and individuals suffer.

We have the knowledge, technology, and — if added to the State Building Code — the power to avoid wildfire disasters through better planning. Let's get started.

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