

## Learning about disorders

**Dear Annie:** I read your column every day and am a faithful fan. Your column reaches a multitude of readers and is a valuable way to enlighten and educate on topics either not talked about or not well known. I wanted to write to you about a condition that my son has, in hopes of educating people about it, as there are many others who have the same condition and are suffering in silence.

**DEAR ANNIE**



ANNIE LANE  
Creators  
Syndicate Inc.

My son has prosopagnosia, which is a neurological condition characterized by the inability to recognize the faces of familiar people. Some experts have claimed that 2 percent of the population has the condition. There are two forms, congenital, which means from birth, or acquired, which means through stroke, traumatic brain injury or certain neurodegenerative diseases. It also tends to run in families. Some degree of prosopagnosia is often present in children with autism and Asperger syndrome, and may be the cause of their impaired social development.

My son has had the condition from birth. We always knew that he had trouble identifying people, as he would frequently mix people up when he was younger, such as his own dad and uncle, who, while having similar height and build, looked nothing alike. We always thought it was a quirk — out of sight, out of mind. However, as he got older and started attending school full time, we noticed a change in personality; his self-esteem plummeted and he frequently said he felt dumb and out of place.

This was very scary to witness as a parent. Luckily, he had some amazing teachers along the way who identified and recommended that something else was going on and encouraged us to have a neuropsychological evaluation done. He scored in the first percentile for visual memory. At the same time, his dad read about prosopagnosia. It

was like a lightbulb went off in our heads when we read about the symptoms, and completed a checklist. Our psychologist was receptive to reviewing and learning about this condition and reached out to colleagues.

After further review, and appointments with a neuro-ophthalmologist and neurologist, we were able to get a diagnosis. Now there is no foolproof test to diagnose the condition, but our son had enough of the markers for the doctors to make an educated diagnosis. We can't tell you how much having an answer and learning about the condition really helped our son. While it still took some time and therapy, his mood improved, his self-esteem came back, and he was happy to explain his condition to his friends and family to help them understand.

This is something he will struggle with all his life. There are times when he loses his family in a large crowd or can't find his friends on a playground. There are times when he totally ignores a friend because he runs into him unexpectedly and can't identify him, which results in hurt feelings on both sides. Luckily, he has support from his family, friends and community. Many times we have run into people unexpectedly who know about our son's condition, and they smile and introduce themselves to him and give a brief sentence or two on where he may know them from. This goes a long way in helping him to remember.

Thanks for always being there. — *A Loving Mom in Massachusetts*

**Dear Loving Mom:** Thank you for educating all of us on what must be a difficult condition, one that your son is dealing with admirably, thanks to the courageous and intelligent efforts of you, your husband, the doctors and those special teachers who really cared about your son. Your story is very inspiring.

# Summer camp is newest front in battle with measles outbreak

By **MICHAEL HILL**  
*Associated Press*

ALBANY, N.Y. — The battle to contain the worst U.S. measles outbreak in 27 years has a new front: summer camp.

Vaccinations have been made mandatory this summer for campers and staff in several counties north of New York City that annually fill up with kids from the Orthodox Jewish communities that have been hit hardest by measles.

Ulster County took the extra step of mandating the measles vaccine or proof of immunity at all day camps and overnight camps, becoming the latest county in the area to issue immunization requirements. Rockland County announced a similar order this month, following mandates from Sullivan and Orange counties.

"We have to make sure our t's are crossed and our i's are dotted in making sure all these vaccination records are in and have been fine-combed through to make sure everything is in compliance," said Rabbi Hanoch Hecht, of Ulster County's Camp Emunah, which hosts many girls from a Chabad community in Brooklyn's Crown Heights.

"In the past where we accepted religious exemptions for certain things," said Hecht, who is getting his own blood checked for immunity, "now we cannot."

The state of New York requires summer camps to keep immunization records for all campers, but doesn't bar children from attending if they haven't gotten a measles shot.

Children are required to get the measles vaccine to attend schools in New York, however, and Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation Thursday eliminating an exemption for kids whose parents object to vaccinations on religious grounds.

The Centers for Dis-



AP Photo/Mike Groll

**Orthodox Jewish girls walk to waiting buses after summer day camp in 2014 in Kiryas Joel, New York. Kiryas Joel is a tightly packed Hasidic enclave surrounded by suburbia in the Hudson Valley.**

ease Control and Prevention reported that, as of June 1, more than 1,000 measles cases had been reported in the U.S. since the start of the year, up from fewer than 100 cases a year a decade ago. The bulk of those cases have been diagnosed in ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn and suburban Rockland County.

The CDC recommends everyone over a year old should get the vaccine, except for people who had the disease as children. Those who have had measles are immune.

The vaccine, which became available in the 1960s, is considered safe and highly effective — paving the way for measles to be declared all but eliminated in the U.S. in 2000. But it has had a resurgence several times, including 667 cases in 2014.

Hecht and others stressed that vaccinations are widely accepted by most members of the Orthodox com-

munity, echoing rabbis in Brooklyn and Rockland County who say it is a relatively small group of parents influenced by anti-vaccination propaganda — not religious teachings — who have resisted inoculations.

The Orthodox Union said it has previously required up-to-date vaccinations, including the MMR vaccine, for its 37 summer programs.

"Most of the leaders and rabbis have taken the approach that vaccination is required," Hecht said.

Health officials in New York City have taken a tough approach, making measles vaccinations mandatory for everyone living in the Brooklyn neighborhood that is the epicenter of the outbreak, fining people for failing to get inoculated and closing 12 schools for failing to exclude staff and students who couldn't document immunity. The city announced the two most recent closures Thursday.

Now, as schools prepare

to close down for the summer, the fight is spreading into the Catskills and Hudson River Valley.

Sullivan County is in the heart of the traditional Borscht Belt, and the lake-laden area still attracts thousands to its camps and bungalow colonies each summer. Of the 170 state-regulated camps in the county, 139 are Orthodox Jewish camps.

"We draw such a population from New York City, where this measles outbreak was," Sullivan County spokesman Dan Hust said. "It was considered prudent and wise."

Not everyone agrees. The orders from Sullivan and Orange counties were challenged in state courts by parents of various religious faiths. However, civil rights attorney Michael Sussman said Friday he believes those cases will have to be withdrawn given New York's removal of religious exemptions.

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