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OUR VIEW

The danger of measles is too easy to forget

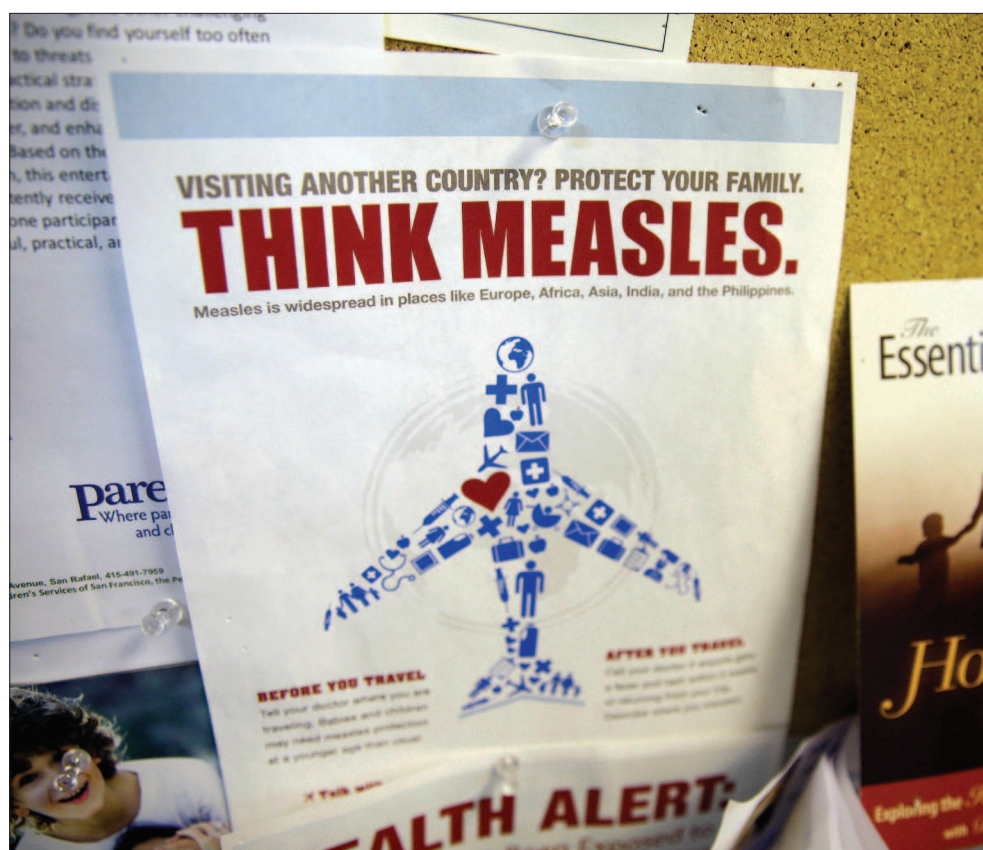
As a society, we have made such progress against once-common illnesses that we forget they are still around and still potentially life-threatening. The measles outbreak in Southeast Washington exemplifies what can happen if we lower our vigilance — and our vaccinations.

High rates of vaccination kept measles under control in the U.S., with about 60 cases annually during 2000 to 2010, according to the Mayo Clinic. In recent years, that average has climbed to 205 cases, most often among people who either were unvaccinated or did not know whether they were. There were 350 cases in the U.S. last year.

As of this writing, 35 confirmed cases and 11 suspected cases have occurred this month in Clark County, Washington, and one in Oregon's Multnomah County. At least 30 of the patients had not been immunized — even though getting the combined measles-mumps-rubella vaccine is safer than contracting measles.

Measles is so contagious, and potentially fatal in young children, that Washington Gov. Jay Inslee has declared a state of emergency. People who visited more than 40 locations in the Vancouver-Portland area might have been exposed.

"It's one of the most contagious viruses we have. It can have really serious complications," said Dr. Alan Melnick, the Clark County health officer. "And it's entirely preventable with



A flyer educating parents about measles is displayed on a bulletin board in 2015 at a pediatric clinic in Greenbrae, Calif.

an incredibly cheap and safe vaccine."

But the measles vaccination rate in Clark County was only 78 percent.

People forget that measles killed hundreds of people each year, and caused serious health complications for thousands more, before the disease was declared eradicated in the U.S. at the start of the 21st century.

But measles persisted elsewhere. Around the world, more than 100,000 people die from measles each year, most of them children under age 5.

The measles outbreak in the Van-

couver-Portland area, combined with an increase in flu cases, has caused some Oregon hospitals to restrict visitors.

Flu is so common that people often forget about its potential consequences as well. Yet influenza and related complications killed an estimated 80,000 Americans last winter, far above a typical year because last year's vaccine was not as effective.

The influenza virus mutates, so each year's vaccine is formulated to provide immunity against the strains

considered most probable to cause an outbreak. That is why getting a flu vaccine each year matters. Many Americans don't do so.

Influenza and related conditions hospitalized 1,562 people in Oregon last year and led to the deaths of three children. Although last year's vaccine was less effective, an Oregon Health Authority study found that seniors who got high-dose flu shots were less likely to be hospitalized.

"Pandemic," a popular board game, shows how easily diseases can spread. The Vancouver-Portland measles outbreak is not nearly an epidemic, let alone a pandemic. Neither is this year's flu season in Oregon.

But it is worth noting that this winter is the 100th anniversary of the worst pandemic in recorded history. As the flu mutated into a global killer, it took the lives of 50 million to 100 million people, including about 675,000 in the U.S. during the course of one year.

This grim anniversary is a reminder that we dare not forget the past, ignore what could happen in the future — or fail to get our vaccinations.

To quote a Washington Post story from last year about the pandemic, "the 1918 nightmare serves a reminder. If a virulent enough strain were to emerge again, a century of modern medicine might not save millions from dying."

There were no worthwhile flu vaccines in 1917-18. There are today, just as there is a measles vaccine.

OTHER VIEWS

The fleecing of millennials continues

For Americans under the age of 40, the 21st century has resembled one long recession.

I realize that may sound like an exaggeration, given that the economy has now been growing for almost a decade. But the truth is that younger Americans have not benefited much.

Look at incomes, for starters. People between the ages of 25 and 34 were earning slightly less in 2017 than people in that same age group had been in 2000.

The wealth trends look even worse. Since the century's start, median net worth has plummeted for every age group under 55.

Why is this happening? The main reason is a lack of economic dynamism. Not as many new companies have been forming since 2000 — for reasons that experts don't totally understand — and existing companies have been expanding at a slower rate. (The pace of job cuts has also fallen, which is why the unemployment rate has stayed low.) Rather than starting new projects, companies are sitting on big piles of cash or distributing it to their shareholders.

This loss of dynamism hurts millennials and the younger Generation Z, even as baby boomers are often doing OK. Because the layoff rate has declined since 2000, most older workers have been able to hold on to their jobs. For those who are retired, their income — through a combination of Social Security and 401(k)s — still outpaces inflation on average.

But many younger workers are struggling to launch themselves into good-paying careers. They then lack the money to buy a first home or begin investing in the stock market. Yes, older workers face their own challenges, like age discrimination. Overall, though, the generational gap in both income and wealth is growing.

Given these trends, you'd think the government would be trying to help the young. But it's not. If anything, federal and state policy is going in the other direction. Medi-

care and Social Security have been spared from cuts. Programs that benefit younger workers and families have not.

The biggest example is higher education. During the past decade, states have cut college funding by an average of 16 percent per student. It's a shocking form of economic myopia. In response, tuition has risen, and students have taken on more debt. Worst of all, many students attend colleges with high dropout rates and end up with debt but no degree.

And as badly as the government is treating the young today, the future looks even more ominous.

First, the national debt, while manageable now, is on pace to soar. The primary cause is the cost of health care: Most Americans receive far more in Medicare benefits than they paid in Medicare taxes. The Trump tax cut also plays a role. It is increasing the debt — and it mostly benefits older, affluent households.

Second, the warming planet is likely to cause terrible damage and bring huge costs.

Young Americans favor aggressive action, now, to slow climate change. But the Republican Party — which wins elections with strong support from older voters — has vetoed any such action. As a result, greenhouse gases keep spewing into the atmosphere, and the climate crisis is likely to be far worse than it needs to be. Today's young Americans will be left to suffer the consequences and bear the costs.

Last week, one of those young Americans — somebody who qualifies as an older millennial — announced that he was running for president: the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, Indiana, Pete Buttigieg. A Navy veteran and Rhodes scholar who's been praised by Barack Obama, Buttigieg is a rising star in Democratic politics. But of course he is a long shot to win the nomination. He is the mayor of a moderate-size city, after all.

And yet I think his candidacy is import-



ant, because it has the potential to influence the entire campaign. Buttigieg kicked off his run by talking about "intergenerational justice" and made clear that he would focus sharply on the future. After we spoke Friday, I looked at my notes and discovered he hadn't said "Trump" once.

During our conversation, I asked him how he hoped to win over older Americans — who, to their credit, vote at much higher rates than the young — and he told me an intriguing story. When he first ran for mayor of South Bend in 2011, he had the money to conduct only one poll. In it, his team asked voters how they would feel about having such a young mayor. The group most likely to see it as an advantage were the oldest voters.

"Many of the people who respond most positively to a moral message about the future are older people," he said. "The American story is one of making sure that

each generation is better off than the last. I don't want my generation to be the first not to enjoy that. But I also think older generations don't want to be the ones to cause that."

There are some unavoidable trade-offs between the young and the old: A dollar spent on Medicare is unavailable for universal pre-K. But the country's biggest economic problems aren't about hordes of greedy old people profiting off the young. They're about an economy that showers much of its bounty on the already affluent, at the expense of most Americans — and of our future. The young pay the biggest price for these inequities.

That's a vital subject for the 2020 campaign, whoever the leading candidates end up being.

David Leonhardt is a columnist for the New York Times.

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