

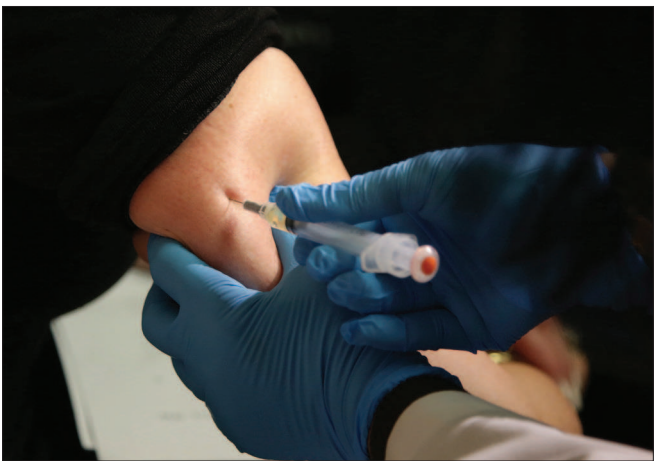
U.S. measles cases hit highest mark in 25 years

By **MIKE STOBBE**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Measles in the U.S. has climbed to its highest level in 25 years, closing in on 700 cases this year in a resurgence largely attributed to misinformation that is turning parents against vaccines.

Public health officials are worried, not just because measles can be dangerous in itself, but because its return could mean other diseases that were seemingly consigned to the past may be coming back, too.

Officials in hard-hit New York City on Wednesday reported 61 new cases since late last week, in what would make this the nation’s worst year for measles since 1994, with eight months still to go. Other states are reporting more cases, too.



AP Photo/Seth Wenig, File

In this March 27, 2019, file photo, a woman receives a measles, mumps and rubella vaccine at the Rockland County Health Department in Pomona, N.Y.

The official nationwide count will not be released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention until Monday. CDC officials said they are reviewing the latest reports.

Roughly three-quarters of this year’s illnesses in the U.S. have been in New York state, mainly in two ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn and suburban Rockland

County. Most of those cases have been in unvaccinated people.

The number of cases is likely to go even higher. Measles is highly contagious and can spread through the air when someone coughs or sneezes. And in recent days, Jewish families have been gathering for Passover meals. It can take 10 to 12 days for symptoms to develop.

The CDC recommends the vaccine for everyone over a year old, 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, and because of it, measles was declared all but eliminated in the U.S. in 2000. But it has made comebacks since

then, with 667 cases in 2014.

Public health experts say some U.S. communities have low vaccination rates because of the spread of bad information — especially the now-debunked notion that the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine is linked to autism — through social media, pamphlets, hotlines and other means.

“Many parents are afraid. And if you want to believe your kid doesn’t need that many shots, there’s plenty of places to find people who agree with you,” said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, former head of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. “It’s not so easy to discern what is real and what is not.”

Measles in most people is not life-threatening. The most common symptoms include fever, runny nose,

cough and a rash all over the body. However, a very small fraction of people can suffer complications such as pneumonia and a dangerous swelling of the brain.

According to the CDC, for every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die from it. No deaths have been recorded this year.

Measles’ return may be an early warning sign of resurgences in other vaccine-preventable diseases such as German measles, chickenpox and bacterial meningitis, said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University vaccine expert.

“Measles is the signal that in these communities where there’s profound under-vaccination, they are susceptible to a whole menu of communicable diseases we thought were relegated to yesteryear,” he said.

Court wonders whether it is authorized to rule on Manson follower’s parole

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A California appeals court on Wednesday questioned whether it has jurisdiction to decide on parole for Charles Manson follower Leslie Van Houten or whether the issue becomes moot after the governor weighs in.

Van Houten’s attorney told a three-judge panel of the 2nd District Court of Appeals that his client is remorseful and takes responsibility for her

crimes. A state prosecutor said the 69-year-old has placed too much blame on Manson himself.

Van Houten was 19 when she and fellow members of Manson’s cult stabbed Los Angeles grocer Leno LaBianca and his wife, Rosemary, to death in 1969.

The killings took place a day after other so-called Manson family members killed actress Sharon Tate and four others in crimes that shocked the world.

Van Houten, who is

serving a life sentence, was not involved in the other killings.

The appeals judges are reviewing a lower court’s ruling that denied Van Houten parole last year.

Since then, a parole board recommended that she be freed, a decision undergoing a five-month review process before heading to Gov. Gavin Newsom.

The judges wondered whether they still would have jurisdiction to rule if

Newsom denies Van Houten parole.

Van Houten’s attorney, Rich Pfeiffer, told the judges they not only have jurisdiction but a duty to decide, adding that no elected politician will ever agree to Van Houten’s parole because of the infamy of the case.

“If the courts don’t release Miss Van Houten, she’s never going to be released,” Pfeiffer said. “The courts are empowered to make difficult decisions, and sometimes unpopu-

lar decisions, to be able to enforce the law. That’s what courts are there for. Otherwise it turns into mob rule.”

Deputy Attorney General Jill VanderBorght said the issue should rest with whatever Newsom decides. She said Pfeiffer’s argument that Van Houten is unlikely to get released without a court decision was irrelevant.

“We’re only looking at this single instance of parole reversal,” she said. “We don’t have to think of

tomorrow or politics. In fact, the court should not.”

The judges gave Pfeiffer and VanderBorght five days to file arguments on the jurisdiction issue. The judges have three months to decide on Van Houten’s parole.

A parole board has recommended that Van Houten be released three times since 2016, finding that she’s no longer a threat to society. Former Gov. Jerry Brown blocked the first two recommendations.

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