

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 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 Vancouver-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.

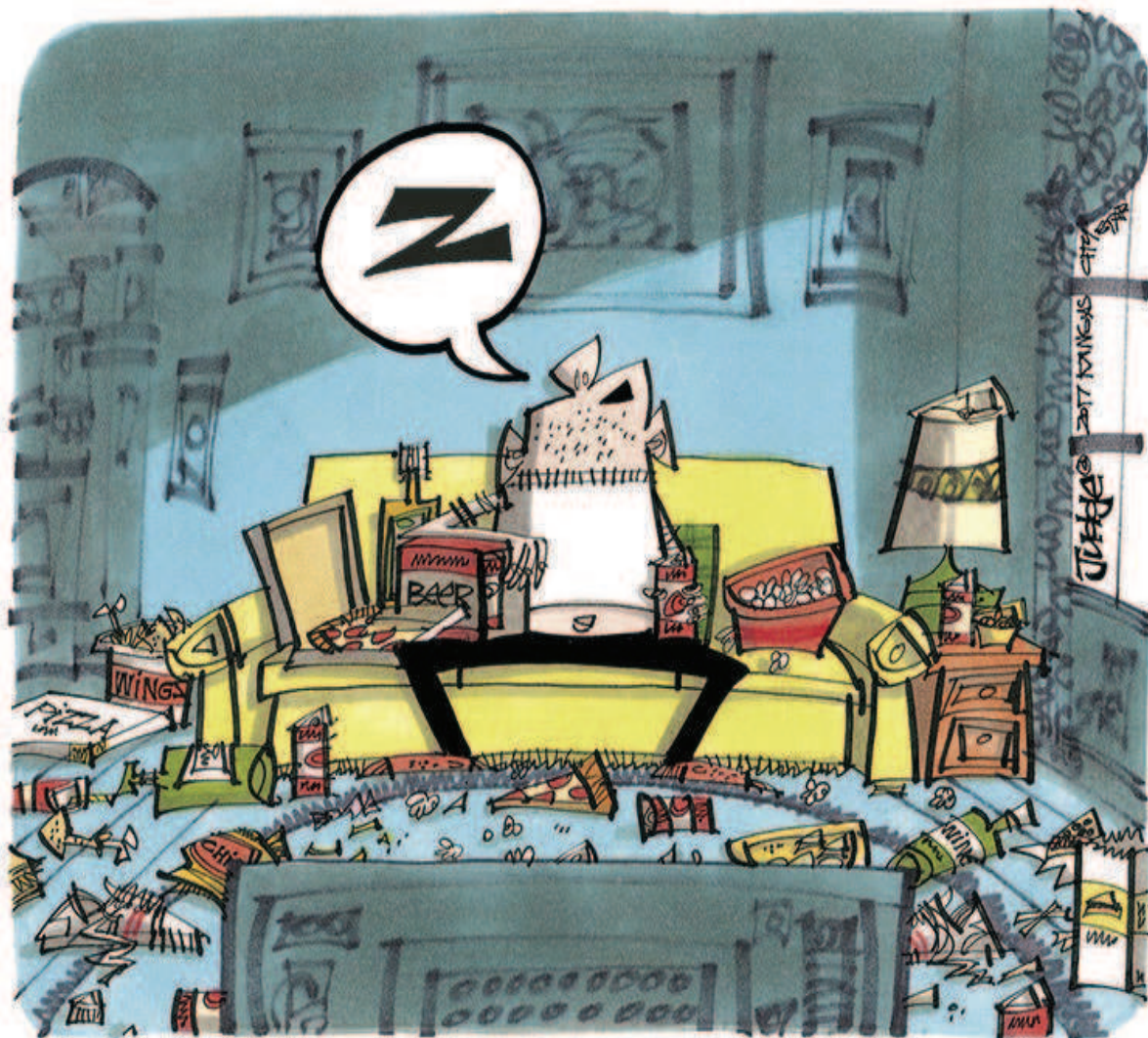
"Pandemic," a popular board game, shows how easily diseases can spread. The Vancouver-Portland measles outbreak is not nearly an epidemic, let alone a pandemic. Neither is this year's flu season in Oregon.

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.



GUEST COMMENT

Mom and Dad, cool it

If you are the mother or father of a high school athlete here in Oregon, this message is primarily for you.

When you attend an athletic event that involves your son or daughter, cheer to your heart's content, enjoy the camaraderie that high school sports offer and have fun. But when it comes to verbally criticizing game officials or coaches, cool it.

Make no mistake about it. Your passion is admired, and your support of the hometown team is needed. But so is your self-control. Yelling, screaming and berating the officials humiliates your child, annoys those sitting around you, embarrasses your child's school and is the primary reason Oregon has an alarming shortage of high school officials.

It's true. According to a recent survey by the National Association of Sports Officials, more than 75 percent of all high school officials say "adult behav-



Karissa Niehoff



Peter Weber

ior" is the primary reason they quit. And 80 percent of all young officials hang up their stripes after just two years of whistle blowing. Why? They don't need your abuse.

Plus, there's a ripple effect. There are more officials over 60 than under 30 in many areas. And as older, experienced officials retire, there aren't enough younger ones to replace them. If there are no officials, there are no games. The shortage of licensed high school officials is severe enough in some areas that athletic events are being postponed or cancelled — especially at the freshman and junior varsity levels.

Research confirms that participation in high school sports

and activities instills a sense of pride in school and community, teaches lifelong lessons like the value of teamwork and self-discipline and facilitates the physical and emotional development of those who participate. So, if the games go away because there aren't enough men and women to officiate them, the loss will be infinitely greater than just an "L" on the scoreboard. It will be putting a dent in your community's future.

If you would like to be a part of the solution to the shortage of high school officials, you can sign up to become a licensed official at highschoolofficials.com. Otherwise, adult role models at high school athletic events here in Oregon are always welcome.

Karissa Niehoff is the executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations. Peter Weber is the executive director of the Oregon School Activities Association.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fortunate for terrific neighbors

To the Editor:

I attended the Grant County Planning Commission informational meeting the evening of Jan. 24 at the John Day fire station.

A question regarding the establishment of a bed and breakfast came up. Because my new neighbors had applied for a permit to do just that, I shared my experience with the process.

It is procedural for the planning department to send notices to the adjacent landowners regarding this permit request. If there are any concerns or objections, they are invited to a joint session with all parties to voice these. I and three others received notices.

We collectively had concerns with this enterprise in our residential neighborhood. We drafted a list of several concerns in the form of objections.

We had a hearing with the planning commission and the new neighbors. Most important to us was the expected impact on water and the private road. The planning commission heard

all sides, and the permit was granted.

I'm not sure my response to a question regarding the impact to the water issue was clearly articulated. This is the main reason I wrote this letter. I want those who were present to know any issue I have had with water is not as a result of the bed and breakfast operation. In fact, none of the concerns I had have materialized to date.

Pete and Andrea Martinez, who own the Victorian Lane B&B, are gracious and congenial people. Also, their son Branden Schlarbaum and his three daughters are a delight. Branden and I have shared in many things since they arrived. I am blessed to have these folks for neighbors. As I consider the neighborhood, I have to say I am fortunate to be surrounded by terrific neighbors.

Bill Wilcox
John Day

Cleaning up the PERS deficit

To the Editor:

I read that our governor's husband cleaned a federal toilet

during the government shutdown. Then he sent President Trump a bill for \$27 for his labors. Well isn't that just peachy, Mr. First Husband; my, how civic minded you are! If you get a check from the president, could you give it to your wife so she can help pay down the PERS deficit that she has ignored for so many years.

Thanks in advance for your generosity.

Bob Phillips
John Day

Feeling betrayed about fire station

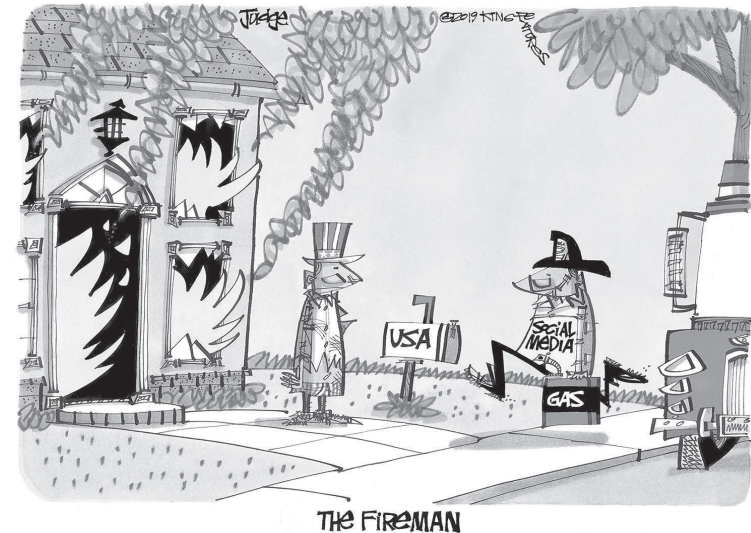
To the Editor:

I voted for a new fire station. The area needed a new fire station. Now they have changed the use of the new fire station almost before the fire department got moved in.

I did not vote for the fire station to house a dispatch center. If the area being used for a dispatch center was not needed by the fire department then we should have built a smaller fire station.

Do you feel a little bit betrayed? I do.

Tom Sutton
John Day



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Publisher: Chris Rush, crush@eomediagroup.com
Editor & General Manager: Sean Hart, editor@bmeagle.com
Reporter: Richard Hanners, rick@bmeagle.com
Community News: Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
Sports: Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
Marketing Rep: Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
Administrative Assistant: Makenna Adair, office@bmeagle.com
Office Assistant: Alixandra Hand, office@bmeagle.com

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