

## EDITORIAL: Step up, America, and vaccinate your children



Pediatrician Charles Goodman, talks with patient Carmen Lopez, 37, holding her 18-month-old son, Daniel after being vaccinated with the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine, or MMR at his practice in Northridge, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 29, 2015.

DAMIAN DOVARGANES — AP

Americans don't ask much of each other. Our freedom to say what we want, live where we want, even ignore science if we don't believe it, tends not to be abridged. But sometimes the common good has to supersede personal freedom.

So we are asking, though in a saner world, we wouldn't have to: Step up and vaccinate your kids.

In the weeks since one diseased visitor infected eight mostly unimmunized infants, children and adults, the Disneyland measles epidemic has spread to at least seven other states and Mexico.

All this, because a willful minority of vaccine resisters have forced immunization rates below the threshold for so-called "herd immunity" in parts of California. All this, because a little discredited science bounced around in the echo chambers of a few insular, lefty-libertarian enclaves long enough to persuade impressionable parents that immunization was a threat.

As recently as 2000, measles was a nonissue in the U.S. Now, thanks to the anti-vax movement, every year brings another epidemic of another once-conquered infectious disease at an estimated net cost to taxpayers, in constant dollars, of more than \$11,000 per case.

Abetting the trend has been California's needlessly broad "personal belief" exemption to the law requiring parents to

vaccinate kindergartners. In recent years, its use has soared in places like Orange and Marin counties, where affluent pockets pride themselves in their distrust of institutions.

Well, that's their right. And we haven't joined the calls — yet — to ban personal belief exemptions for public school students. We still like to think that ignorance is best conquered with information.

But over the past decade, all that fear-based exercising of rights has slashed 3 full percentage points from the proportion of children fully immunized against measles. Now only about 93 percent are immunized statewide, a hair's breadth from the point at which the immunity of the masses can stop the infected few from creating even worse epidemics.

And a new law, forcing parents to hear about the risks to their kids if they opt out, has only recently started to make a difference.

So here are the facts: Vaccines aren't completely risk-free, but they don't cause autism, as some anti-vax enthusiasts have purported. Nor do they contain mercury.

Unvaccinated people are 35 times more likely to get and transmit measles, and the complications are far worse than the side effects of immunization. And that goes not just for individuals, but for all those around them — infants too young to get shots, parents whose vaccines may have worn off, the sick, the elderly.

Believe it or don't. No one will force you. It's America, land of the free. But freedom includes the right to let freedom rest sometimes — and the right to do the right thing.

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