

## EDITORIAL: Finally, reason takes over the measles debate

By The Bee Editorial Board



In this Thursday, Jan. 29, 2015 photo, a pediatrician holds a dose of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine at his practice in Northridge, Calif. Vaccinations can cause minor side effects including redness at the injection site and sometimes mild fever, but medical experts say serious complications are rare and much less dangerous than the diseases that vaccines prevent.

DAMIAN DOVARGANES — AP Photo

Reason took center stage this week in the Disneyland measles outbreak. Good for Sens. Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, and Ben Allen, D-Santa Monica, who [introduced legislation](#) to make it harder for parents to opt out of vaccinating schoolchildren in this state.

It's unfortunate that state law should have to change for immunity levels to be restored in California. Like many, we had hoped social responsibility and hard facts would be enough to make parents voluntarily do the right thing, public health-wise.

But the rapid spread of the lethal disease — to 14 states and Mexico in less than eight weeks — has underscored the need for bold action. And the immunity to facts that has fueled this problem has persisted in influential quarters.

Even as Pan and Allen were fielding press calls, affluent Los Angeles anti-vaxxers were heading for the Chinese Theatre in Hollywood for the premiere of a [new crackpot documentary](#) that perpetuates the discredited claim that autism is linked to vaccinations. Eagerly spreading the word were celebrity Southern California Dr. Feelgoods, pediatricians Bob Sears and Jay Gordon, who enable parents who don't vaccinate. Why the California Medical Board doesn't go after their licenses is beyond us.

California's broad "personal belief" exemption hasn't helped matters, offering a needlessly huge loophole in the law requiring kindergarten immunizations. Only 20 states let parents off the hook just because they personally are misinformed or pressed for time or just superstitious about immunization.

The majority of states restrict exemptions to those with specific medical conditions, such as suppressed immune systems, or to members of religions that ban vaccination.

That's why, if it weren't for "personal belief," California might not have had this outbreak. The vast majority of Americans — and Californians — do vaccinate their children, and for many years, that so-called "herd immunity" protected even the anti-vaxxers.

It has only been recently, as resisters here have driven some local vaccination rates far below the herd immunity threshold, that lawmakers have begun to see the need to do more.

This year, more than 13,000 California parents heard all the medical evidence in favor of vaccinating their children, and then proceeded not to, citing personal belief.

California shouldn't be ground zero for anyone's public health mess. This is the cradle of high tech, for pity's sake.

We hope all lawmakers stand tough. No doubt there will be a fight over the Pan-Allen bill as it progresses, but on this one, reason needs to win.

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