

Make Sure Your Children's Vaccinations Are Current



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OPINION FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As parents prepare to send their children back to school, my mind is on the health of our students who have already endured a number of trials caused by a global pandemic. I'm thinking about these children not just as a health officer and emergency room physician, but also as someone who has had the good fortune to co-parent six children with my wife, Lori. Through the years, we have faced our own challenges related to rearing children in this day and age – take the internet and social media. (Please.)

I understand. Parents have a tough row to hoe, and one thing they should not have to worry about in this day and age is their children contracting *polio*.

Or *mumps*. Or *rubella*.

Or *smallpox*. Or *tetanus*.

Or *measles*. Or *whooping cough*.

Or *any* disease preventable by routine immunization.

This is where I replace my dad hat with my doc hat. Immunizations save lives. Period. Even in my career as an emergency room physician, I still see young patients with diseases preventable by vaccine. I marvel every time it happens. But for a dose or two of proven vaccine, those children could be outside running around instead of fighting for their lives.

I shouldn't be surprised, though. We are in the midst of what experts at the United Nations, the World Health Organization and UNICEF are calling "a global child health crisis," "a red alert for child health," and "the largest sustained drop in childhood immunizations in a generation." Their data show that 25 million children worldwide missed routine immunizations largely because the pandemic disrupted regular health services or triggered misinformation about vaccines in general.

People across the planet, ourselves included, were so focused on surviving COVID-19 that we took our eye off the ball for routine health care. The worst effects so far are in East Asia and the Pacific. You may say that's too far away to matter to us, but we live in a global society. COVID-19 has certainly taught us what that looks like. What happens in one part of the world doesn't *stay* there. It will have a ripple effect.

History shows us how vaccines have prevented childhood deaths. Very recent history shows us how our communities are still at risk. You only have to go back as far as 2019 to see 1,274 cases of measles confirmed in 31 states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Look back one month ago and you'll find a fresh case of polio in New York City.)

Health Commissioner Mary Bassett said that this one case of polio in an unvaccinated adult, coupled with the detection of the virus in sewage outside the nation's largest city, could indicate an outbreak is underway. She called it "just the tip of the iceberg."

The advice from this doc is to make sure your family's vaccinations are current. Our children should receive a variety of immunizations from birth to 24 months, kids entering school for the first time, in seventh and twelfth grades. School sports are amping up – kids will huddle together for band, football and cheer practice. College students will be in apartments or residence halls – make sure they are protected. Meningitis is a deadly and crippling disease that is easily prevented with a vaccine. Learn which immunizations your child's college recommends, and even if they've left for school already, make sure your adult children get those shots. There's likely a great county health department not far from campus.

When you bring your children to the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department, we will review their immunization record with you. Please make an appointment so we can serve you better. Call us at (304) 348-8080 today, and let us help protect your family.

— *Steven Eshenaur, D.O., M.B.A., is the director and health officer of the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department.*

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