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May 2-8, 2019

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# THE EXAMINER

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF SOUTHEAST TEXAS

# MEASLES



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# Measles: From wiped out to outbreak

By Sharon Brooks  
Business Editor

Following exposures leading to quarantines at two college campuses in California and 78 new cases reported in one week, as of April 26, more people have been diagnosed with measles in 2019 than since 1994 – six years prior to eradication of the disease in the United States – and even higher than 2014, the worst year since elimination, when 667 cases were reported.

And that was for a whole year. We still have eight months to go in 2019, and reports of new measles cases keep coming, with more and more people diagnosed every day. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report 704 cases of measles have been confirmed in 22 states. The states reporting measles cases to the CDC are Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington – and right here in Texas.

One of those cases, though not contracted locally, was diagnosed in Port Arthur.

## Local diagnosis highlights national outbreaks

A sick seaman docking in Port Neches was diagnosed with measles at a Port Arthur hospital, and although health officials there have assured the public those cities are safe from the vaccine-preventable illness, outbreaks across the nation are causing concern among federal health agencies and communities.

According to a news release from the city of Port Arthur Health Department, the agency received information in February about a man on a vessel who was experiencing signs and symptoms of measles. The man was transported to the hospital where, the health department reported, “necessary precautions were taken.” As a precautionary measure, no other crew member was given permission to leave the ship.

Laboratory tests confirmed that the crewman had measles. The man, who was not from this area or the U.S., “posed no significant threat to the community because he was taken immediately to the hospital,” the health department stated in the release. Per CDC guidelines, the patient was cleared to travel back to his country on Feb. 25.

“Measles is highly contagious and is transmitted primarily from person to person by respiratory droplets and is airborne spread,” warned the health department. “Signs and symptoms include fever  $\geq 101^\circ$  F, cough, runny nose or conjunctivitis and generalized maculopapular rash lasting  $> 3$  days.”

Measles (rubeola) is a highly contagious viral

disease. It is widespread in many parts of the world, including Europe, Africa and Asia. Measles begins with a fever that lasts for a couple of days, followed by a cough, runny nose, conjunctivitis (pink eye) and a rash. The rash typically appears first on the face, along the hairline and behind the ears, and then affects the rest of the body. Infected people are usually contagious from about four days before their rash starts to four days afterwards. Approximately 90 percent of unvaccinated people exposed to the measles virus develop symptoms in seven to 21 days, according to the CDC.

## National outbreaks

More than 700 students and staff of two California universities were ultimately placed under quarantine as of April 26 due to concern following their possible exposure to measles. The University of California, Los Angeles, and California State University, Los Angeles, both took measures to isolate anyone who may have been exposed to measles. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health warned that five cases had been diagnosed in Los Angeles County, and exposures could have occurred at the two schools and three other locations, according to a news release issued April 22. “The following locations have been currently identified as potential measles exposures,” stated the release. “Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), Tom Bradley International Terminal, arrived at Gate 218 on April 1 from 6:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.; University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Franz Hall on April 2, 4, and 9 and Boelter Hall on April 2 and 9 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; California State University, Los Angeles, Main Library, on April 11 from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.; El Pollo Loco Restaurant, 1939 Verdugo Blvd., La Cañada Flintridge, on April 11 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. and El Sauz Tacos, 4432 San Fernando Rd, Glendale, on April 13 from 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.”

By April 25, between the two campuses nearly 300 university students and staff had been quarantined, with that number more than doubling by the next day. Those who have since been able to provide proof of vaccination and those who lab tests confirm are immune to measles have been released from quarantine, which was expected to last between 24 to 48 hours in most cases.

Measles outbreaks, defined as three or more cas-



‘Many parents who do everything right in terms of vaccination still face the risk that their children will get measles during an outbreak.’

– Allison Winnike, J.D., president and CEO of The Immunization Partnership, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

es, are currently ongoing in New York State’s Rockland County, New York City, Michigan, New Jersey, Butte, LA and

Sacramento counties in California, Georgia and Maryland, reports the CDC. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health determined the five cases reported there were related to international travel and failure to vaccinate.

“These outbreaks are linked to travelers who brought measles back from other countries such as Israel, Ukraine and the Philippines, where large measles outbreaks are occurring,” the CDC described. “Make sure you are vaccinated against measles before traveling internationally.”

A measles scare at the JFK International Airport on April 28 underscores fears associated with international travel. Passengers aboard a JetBlue plane from the Dominican Republic to New York City were delayed Sunday night after the flight landed at JFK Airport from Santo Domingo at about 9 p.m. The aircraft was held at the terminal after officials got reports of a medical emergency on the plane. Out of an abundance of caution, the Port Authority temporarily quarantined the plane while the passengers were examined. JetBlue said in a statement that the passengers were soon cleared and deplaned normally, but the incident is still under investigation.

Measles is most dangerous to the very old and the very young, and children have been disproportionately affected during the recent outbreaks. Of the



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more than 700 measles diagnoses this year, the CDC reports that approximately 50 percent were unvaccinated children.

Allison Winnike, president and CEO of The Immunization Partnership, says mothers of babies in Clark County, Wash., where a measles outbreak had sickened 62 people by Feb. 20, were keeping their infants at home, "afraid to go to libraries or even grocery stores." Most of the measles patients there were unvaccinated children, and smaller outbreaks had begun affecting other counties in the state at that time.

The state of New York has been experiencing a massive measles outbreak. As of April 29, the state health department confirmed 236 cases of measles in New York State, outside of New York City with 202 in Rockland County, 21 in Orange County, 10 in Westchester County, two in Sullivan County and one in Suffolk County. In New York City, there have been 367 cases reported. Members of Orthodox Jewish communities who have not been vaccinated have been heavily impacted there.

In Texas, as of April 9, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) had confirmed 15 measles cases so far this year and urged health care providers to consider measles when diagnosing patients "because early identification, along with immunization, is key to preventing measles from

spreading."

"Many parents who don't want their children vaccinated think it is a simple matter of personal choice. I'll take the risk that my children might get measles, they reason, while other parents can choose not to take that risk and their kids would stay healthy," Winnike described. "But it's not that simple. Many parents who do everything right in terms of vaccination still face the risk that their children will get measles during an outbreak."

President Donald Trump weighed in on the spreading measles epidemic during a statement to media, encouraging parents to have their children vaccinated.

"They have to get the shots. The vaccinations are so important. This is really going around now. They have to get their shots," Trump told CNN's Joe Johns on an April 26 broadcast.

### Vaccination policies at local schools

Lamar University in Beaumont has policies in place to protect its students from disease. The school adheres to state law mandating meningitis vaccinations for students and requires additional vaccinations for students enrolled in "specific departments such as nursing, education and international students."

According to LU Student Health Center Director Shawn Gray, "Lamar requires all incoming students

under the age of 22 to present evidence of the meningitis vaccine within the last five years that covers four strains of bacteria, ACYW. It is also listed in the housing contract as a requirement to live on campus. Other meningitis vaccines, such as meningitis B, are highly recommended for expanded coverage.

"Students in allied health departments, such as nursing, are required to show evidence of hepatitis B, tetanus, MMR (Measles, Mumps & Rubella) and varicella immunizations prior to participation in practicums at the hospitals or other health care facilities as part of the degree plans.

"Students in the department of education are required to show evidence of a negative tuberculosis (TB) skin test or negative blood test for TB if unable to take the skin test.

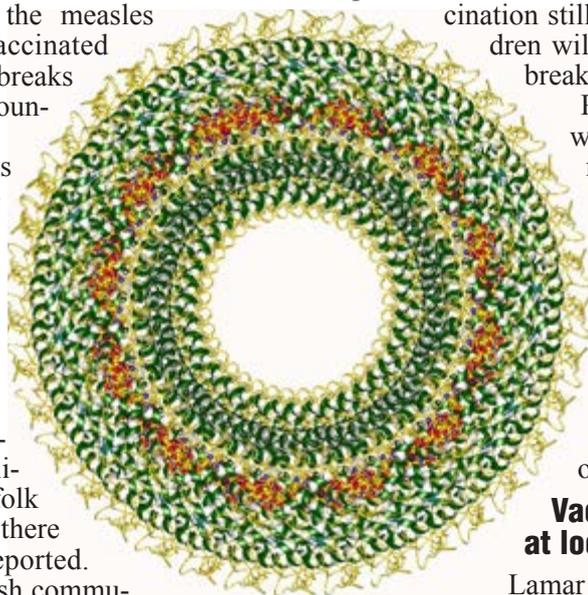
"International students also are required to show evidence of negative TB status upon arrival to the university and annually if they leave the U.S."

Gray says all the immunizations mentioned are offered by the LU Student Health Center.

While the university policy obviously goes a long way to protect students, staff and anyone who may come in contact with them, it does not require the majority of enrolling students to provide proof of childhood vaccinations, such as MMR that would protect them from measles, and puts no requirements on staff.

In most cases, parents who hope to send their children to one of the Beaumont Independent School District's 25 campuses for elementary or secondary education must abide by a state-mandated schedule of vaccines, including the MMR for measles, mumps and rubella – but not always. According to the district,

See MEASLES on page 8A





✓ ENDORSED

# RE-ELECT MIKE GETZ

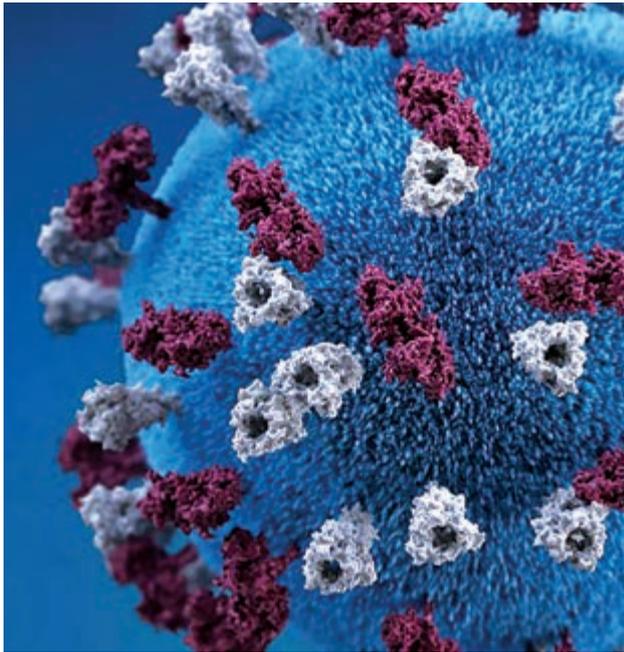
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## MEASLES

from page 7A

exceptions may be made for medical reasons or for reasons of conscience, including religious reasons.

To claim an exclusion for medical reasons, the child or student must present an exemption statement to their school or childcare facility, dated and signed by a properly licensed physician (M.D. or D.O.) in good standing in any state in the United States who has examined the child or student. It must state that, in the physician's opinion, the vaccine required is medically contraindicated or poses a sig-

nificant risk to the health and well-being of the child or student or any member of the child's or student's household. Unless it is written in the statement that a lifelong condition exists, the exemption statement is valid for one year from the date signed by the physician.

Families whose personal beliefs preclude vaccinations must request an affidavit from the DSHS and provide the signed and notarized affidavit to the school or childcare facility that their child will attend. The affidavit is good for two years.

Parents should be aware that a child or student who has not received the required immunizations for medical reasons or reasons of conscience may be excluded from school in times of emergency or epidemic declared by the commissioner of the state health department.

There are no state vaccination requirements for staff, reports BISD spokesperson Hannah LeTulle. She said the district has not received any reports of measles among staff or students and explained that any doctor diagnosing measles is legally obligated to inform the health department.

"If the doctor diagnoses measles, the doctor is required to contact the Beaumont Health Department and the health department will contact BISD if any staff or student has been contaminated," she described. "If a student/staff is diagnosed with measles, we contact the Beaumont Health Department and they give us instructions on how best to follow."

### Emergency readiness

Beaumont Public Health Director Sherry Ulmer says her department is prepared for the worst and has plans in place for numerous possible public health problems of epidemic proportions.

"We have a list of 125 conditions that are required by law to be reported to the health department, and measles is on that list," Ulmer described. "Some must be reported immediately, some within a day and some within a week. Measles must be reported immediately."

According to Ulmer, once the health department receives a call reporting measles, they spring into action, checking immunization records and conducting laboratory testing to confirm the presence of the disease. They would also begin researching the social activities and movements of the person or persons suspected of having measles to find out who could have been exposed to the disease. Once measles is confirmed, they would begin quarantine procedures, isolating anyone exposed to the infection who cannot provide proof of vaccination through immunization records.

"That's why it's so important to have your children vaccinated," Ulmer asserted. "If they are unvaccinated, we would put them in quarantine if they are exposed to measles. We encourage vaccinations. Vaccinations work."

Beaumont has not had a confirmed case of measles in "a few years," said Ulmer, and other than the isolated incident in Port Arthur, Southeast Texas has been safe so far. But, while the area has not experienced a measles "outbreak" as others around the country have, is the state of Texas prepared for such an event? According to a new report "Ready or Not: Protecting the Public's Health from Diseases, Disasters and Bioterrorism," released Feb. 14 by the Trust for America's Health (TFAH), Texas placed in the middle tier of a three-tiered measure of performance on 10 indicators of public health and emergency



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- Elected to City Council as At-Large Councilmember from 1994-2007.
- Elected Mayor of Beaumont in 2007.
- Initiated projects and programs that have improved economic development and advanced the quality of life for residents.
- Worked to enact legislation that enabled the City to use approximately \$50 million in natural gas revenues on important street improvement projects that continue to have a positive impact in all areas of the City.
- Active in numerous government, non-profit and local projects that continue to make Beaumont a great place to live, work and play.

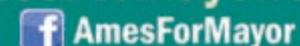
## TOP GOALS

- Ensure our city remains in excellent financial condition.
- Continue to expand/develop emergency operations and maintain excellent working relationships with national, state and local officials.  
*Experience is paramount during natural disasters.*
- Continue work to enhance our Animal Care Center to perpetuate our *No Kill City* status.
- Enhance customer service programs.
- Continue street programs to promote development.
- Maintain safety by providing city staff with the best resources possible.
- Actively promote quality-of-life initiatives.
- Continue to provide equal representation for ALL citizens of Beaumont.

## ENDORSEMENTS

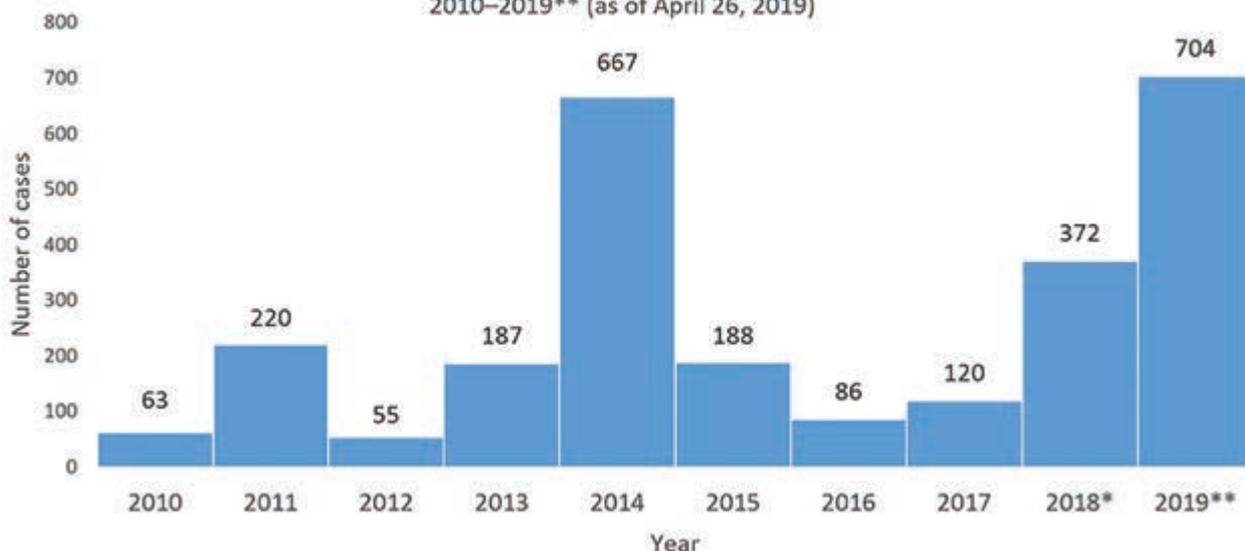
- Beaumont Enterprise
- Beaumont Police Officers Association
- Beaumont Professional Firefighters Local 399
- The Examiner
- El Perico Spanish Newspaper
- Peoples Political Action Committee
- Sabine Area Central Labor Council

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### NUMBER OF MEASLES CASES REPORTED BY YEAR

2010-2019\*\* (as of April 26, 2019)



response readiness.

The 10 key indicators considered in the response readiness report are incident management, cross-sector community collaboration, three measurements of institutional quality determining accreditation of facilities and considering the size of the state public health budget, water security, workforce resiliency, countermeasure utilization (vaccinations), patient safety and health security surveillance.

“Preparedness is key to preventing harm when public health emergencies and natural disasters occur but being prepared requires dedicated funding and multi-sector planning and collaboration,”

said John Auerbach, TFAH president and CEO. “The risks to America’s health security are very real, and in the headlines – from wildfires to floods to food-borne illnesses. These events are wake-up calls. To stay safe, we need to devote more time and money to emergency preparedness.”

In light of the recent surge of confirmed measles cases, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar released a statement April 24 encouraging everyone to get vaccinated against the preventable and highly contagious disease.

“The United States is seeing a resurgence of

measles, a disease that had once been effectively eliminated from our country. And today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed that ongoing measles outbreaks in 22 states has led to the highest number of cases reported nationwide since the disease was declared eliminated in this country in 2000,” Azar stated. “Measles is not a harmless childhood illness, but a highly contagious, potentially life-threatening disease. We have the ability to safely protect our children and our communities. Vaccines are a safe, highly effective public health solution that can prevent this disease. The measles vaccines are among the most extensively studied medical products we have, and their safety has been firmly established over many years in some of the largest vaccine studies ever undertaken.

“With a safe and effective vaccine that protects against measles, the suffering we are seeing is avoidable. The CDC is ready to support public health departments in monitoring and responding to outbreaks, and will continue to receive, review, and compile the latest reports of measles cases.

“All Americans would be safer and healthier if we received measles vaccines on the recommended schedule. Next week is a significant opportunity to educate ourselves on the importance of vaccines, as we mark National Infant Immunization Week. The Department of Health and Human Services will undertake a comprehensive campaign to reinforce the message that vaccines are safe and effective ways to protect your children, your family, yourself, and your neighbors.”

Photos and illustrations courtesy of the CDC. See related commentary on page 24A.

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