

## Op-Ed: Restoring Faith in Vaccines

By Greg Pelletier

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Over the last decade the anti-vaccine movement has increased tremendously. Vaccine hesitancy has led to an increased number of preventable outbreaks in the United States. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) confirmed 370 cases of the measles in 2018, which is more than triple the 120 cases reported in 2017. These commonly referred to “anti-vaxers” assert their right to refuse vaccinations despite the collective expertise of the world’s leading scientists and health professionals. The anti-vaccination community poses a tremendous public health threat to their own children, as well as the rest of the vaccinated population.

The new year started with one of the largest American measles outbreaks in recent history. The CDC confirmed 63 cases in Washington State, in which only two patients received the vaccine. “The measles vaccine isn’t perfect, but one dose is 93 percent effective at preventing illness,” Dr. Alan Melnick, the Washington county’s health officer, said. “The recommended two doses of the measles vaccine provide even greater protection – 97 percent.” After years of lenient laws and misinformation, it is time for states to pass stricter vaccine policies and for Americans to fully vaccinate their children.

The first step in combating the anti-vaxing community is tackling the misinformation and conspiracy theories that run rampant on social media and other platforms. Some of the largest and most renowned organizations have recently come out defying these irrational theories. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently deemed vaccine hesitancy as a top ten threat to

public health. Theories such as “natural immunization is better” or that “vaccines cause autism” are driving vaccine hesitancy forward.

Even with abundant research proving these theories invalid, the anti-vaxing movement is increasing. There have already been five separate measles outbreaks in 2019 and health officials expect many more.

Not only are vaccines extremely effective, but they are surprisingly affordable. The WHO reports that vaccinations are in fact the most cost-effective way of avoiding disease. Treatment is always more expensive than preventative care. “Every dollar spent on childhood immunizations saves \$18.40” says the organization Immunize for Good, who fights to spread facts about vaccinations.

State lawmakers also have tremendous power in preventing outbreaks. Most infections occur in schools and target the youngest and most vulnerable members of society. However, lawmakers have the ability to create stricter vaccine requirements for school-age children. Washington is one of 17 states that allow parents to exempt their school-age children from vaccinations based on personal beliefs. These outrageous exemptions put unconsenting children at risk for many contagious and deadly diseases. It is evident that these outbreaks are occurring at tremendously higher rates in states like Colorado, Texas, and Washington which have the most lenient laws.

As authorities are getting the Washington epidemic under control, state lawmakers are finally designing legislation that would ban the personal belief vaccine exemption. States across the country must take similar action before preventable outbreaks continue to rise and claim American lives. We must restore our faith in facts and research, before disaster strikes again.

### Linked Sources:

- <https://www.publichealth.org/public-awareness/understanding-vaccines/vaccine-myths-debunked/>
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