

Quick Take: Measles cases at second-highest level in decades

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What's the news: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that, for just the first quarter alone, 2019 already has the second-highest number of recorded cases of measles since the disease was considered eradicated from the U.S. in 2000. There were 387 cases reported as of March 28, which already tops 2018's total of 372 and is second only to the 667 cases reported in 2015.

Why it matters for patients and physicians: Cases of measles have been reported in 15 states, including ongoing outbreaks in California, New Jersey, New York and Washington. The majority of people who have gotten the measles have not been vaccinated, the CDC said.

"Getting vaccinated not only keeps individuals from becoming ill with the measles, but also helps prevent further spread to loved ones, neighbors, co-workers and others in close contact," said AMA President Barbara L. McAneny, MD. "As evident from the measles outbreaks currently impacting communities in several states, when individuals are not immunized as a matter of personal preference or misinformation, they put themselves and others at risk of disease."

Dr. McAneny warned that drops in U.S. immunization rates could undo the nation's great progress toward nearly eliminating preventable diseases that are coming back to sicken, disable and kill children.

What's next: The AMA is urging physicians to talk with their patients about vaccine safety and effectiveness and explain the individual and public health risks associated with skipping immunization. "This is important because patients may not be familiar with the diseases that vaccines prevent," Dr. McAneny said.

The AMA also is asking Amazon, Facebook and other tech and social media companies to help stop the viral spread of vaccine misinformation that hinders patients' understanding of what is at stake.

As Dr. McAneny noted, "the overwhelming scientific evidence shows that vaccines are among the most effective and safest interventions to both prevent individual illness and protect the health of the

public.”