

Op-Ed: Protecting Our Children and Public Health

By The Johnson County Board of Health

As members of the Johnson County Board of Health, our duty is to safeguard the well-being of our community. We do so not as politicians or partisans, but as public servants grounded in science, compassion, and common sense. Today, we speak with urgency as we respond to the first confirmed Measles cases in Johnson County. Children in our community must be vaccinated against measles.

Measles is not Just a Rash.

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases known to humanity. Before widespread vaccination, measles routinely infected most children, leading to hospitalizations, brain swelling, lifelong disability, and death. In 1980, more than 2.6 million people died globally from measles. The introduction of the measles vaccine has saved millions of lives. In the U.S., measles was declared eliminated in 2000. That should have been the end of the story.

Instead, we are now seeing a resurgence.

This year, cases of measles are appearing in schools and communities that had once been safe. Infants too young to be vaccinated are now at risk. Immunocompromised individuals—those battling cancer or undergoing organ transplants—are threatened by a disease we know how to prevent. Make no mistake: this resurgence is not due to a failure in science. It is a failure of trust.

Vaccines Work—and Are Safe. Science is clear. Measles vaccines are safe, rigorously tested, and more effective than nearly any other preventive medicine in history. Two doses provide 97% protection. Side effects are rare and almost always mild—especially compared to the disease itself. For example: for a person infected with Measles, the risk of death is 3 in 1000, or 0.3%. This risk is much higher for young children. In contrast, the risk of death related to vaccination is 1 in 1 million, or 0.0001%.

In recent years, misinformation has crept in, eroding confidence. Unfortunately, misinformation regarding vaccines has falsely linked vaccines to autism—despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. This misinformation is playing with lives. Lives of children. Lives in our community.

Words Have Consequences. This is not theoretical. Counties across the U.S. have seen preventable outbreaks, and children have died, all fueled by falling vaccination rates. Hospitals are preparing for cases that should never exist. We are diverting time, personnel,

and resources from other critical services—driven in part by a campaign of fear and falsehoods.

Our Call to Action.

We urge all parents to ensure their children are fully vaccinated, including against measles. Talk to your pediatrician. Consult your school nurse. Look to credible sources like the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, or Johnson County Public Health. The facts are not hard to find, and we encourage you to take your concerns to your physician.

Parents and grandparents - you can protect the children in your life who are too young to be vaccinated by being vaccinated yourself. If you are unsure of your Measles vaccination history, please contact your medical provider to see if you need an additional MMR vaccine.

Public health should not be politicized. As the Johnson County Board of Health, we call upon our community to act together to protect vulnerable individuals by getting vaccinated. Let's do just that—for our children, our community, and our collective future.

Signed,

The Johnson County Board of Health

Dr. Melanie Wellington, PhD, MD

Dr. Peter Wallace, MD, MS

Zach Pollock, PharmD, MS

Dr. Michelle Weckmann, MS, MD

Joni Bosch, PhD, ARNP