Measles Outbreak Out Of Control in Europe

By Julianna LeMieux — July 17, 2017

Measles outbreaks create a lot of fear (and frustration) in people.

That is, in part, because measles 1) is extremely contagious - one person will spread it to 90% of non-immunized people that they contact 2) can spread quickly in a population that is under-vaccinated 3) can lead to long-term health complications and/or death 4) is completely preventable due to an effective vaccine.

People suffering from measles seems ridiculous, given that the United States declared that measles was eliminated in 2000.

However, falling vaccination rates in the United States have caused several recent outbreaks. In 2015, a nationwide spread that originated at the Disneyland Resort Theme Parks in California led to 147 cases. From these, there was one reported death - the first measles related death since 2003. In addition, there is currently an outbreak going on in the Somali community in Minnesota (79 cases - no deaths so far.)

But, the World Health Organization recently reported that thirty-five people have died in the last year from an increase in measles outbreaks in Europe. That is significant because only one or two children will die from every 1000 cases of measles. So, 35 deaths mean a lot of measles in Europe.

Romania had the most deaths — 31, with one each in Germany and Portugal. Italy alone has reported over 3,300 cases and two deaths.
“Every death or disability caused by this vaccine-preventable disease is an unacceptable tragedy,” said Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO regional director for Europe.

This story is not only important for Europe in the midst of this outbreak. It is also an important predictor of what is to come here in the United States unless we establish stricter vaccination laws and work to weaken the anti-vaccine movement. We have had an increase in the number of cases of measles, with 108 cases already in 2017 (there was a total of 70 cases reported in all of 2016.) But, if we keep going in this direction, people are going to start dying here of this preventable disease - as they are in Europe. Is that what it is going to take for people to understand how important vaccination really is?