

Measles in Europe: Italy Has 200 Times as Many Cases as U.S.



By Alex Berezow — February 20, 2018



Credit: Storyblocks [1]

The anti-vaccine movement is not limited just to the United States. Anti-vaxxers are influential in Europe, and the results have been entirely predictable: Europe is in the grip of a measles outbreak.

Most disappointingly, 2016 saw a record low for measles on the continent, according to the [BBC](#) [2]. That year, there were 5,273 cases; in 2017, the number surged 400% to more than 20,000. Thirty-five people died.

One of the persistent myths about measles is that it is a mild childhood illness. It absolutely is not. Not only is it perhaps the most contagious disease known, it can also be lethal. Worldwide, [nearly 90,000 people died](#) [3] from measles in 2016.

Though tragic, this is understandable in developing countries, which often lack vaccines and other basic necessities of healthcare. But it is an outrage that measles occurs anywhere in the developed world. The anti-vaccine movement is entirely to blame.

5,000 Measles Cases in Italy

Italy is the prime example of a developed country that should never experience measles. Yet, in 2017, the country had [5,006 cases](#) [2], for an incidence of about 8 measles cases per 100,000 people. Compare that to the U.S., which had [118 cases](#) [4] for an incidence of roughly 0.04 per 100,000 people. **Thus, in 2017, on a per capita basis, Italy had more than 200 times as many measles cases as the U.S.**

Worsening matters is the fact that the anti-vaccine movement is being enabled by populist politicians. In Italy, the Five Star Movement -- a political party founded by a comedian -- has [endorsed anti-vaccine propaganda](#)

[5], such as the false belief that vaccines are linked to "leukaemia, poisoning, inflammation, immunodepression, inheritable genetic mutations, cancer, autism and allergies."

According to [Politico Europe](#) [6], Beppe Grillo, the Five Star movement's founder, "mocked compulsory vaccines as part of his stand-up routine in the late 1990s, and the party repeatedly tied vaccines to autism." Then, when Italians started heeding his propaganda, which resulted in a decline in vaccinations, Grillo blamed the pro-vaccine prime minister.

Some Italian politicians are fighting back: The same Politico piece describes an effort to expand the number of vaccines that are required for children to enter school. The U.S. State of Oregon is taking matters a step further. Starting on February 21, children who are not fully vaccinated will be [kicked out of school and day care facilities](#) [7].

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

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Links

[1] <https://www.storyblocks.com/stock-image/syringe-against-blue-background-bw7kaqbxowj6gnrmgz>

[2] <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-43125242>

[3] <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs286/en/>

[4] <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html>

[5] <https://www.thelocal.it/20170505/measles-cases-up-fivefold-italy-five-star-movement-beppe-grillo-vaccination-matteo-renzi>

[6] <https://www.politico.eu/article/vaccine-debate-gives-italian-election-campaign-a-shot-in-the-arm/>

[7]

<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/ERD/Pages/GetImmunizationsUpdatedBeforeSchoolExclusionDayFebruary21.aspx>