

## Transcription: Measles outbreak in Minnesota

*Host* : Health officials in Minnesota are tackling the worst measles outbreak in nearly 30 years. Most of those with the disease are unvaccinated Somali-American children. Minnesota has the largest Somali population in this country. The State health commissioner says the community has been targeted with misinformation about vaccine risk. Jamie Yuccas is in Children's Minnesota Hospital, and she joins us now with this story. Jamie, good morning.

JY: Good morning! Here at Children's Minnesota doctors have treated 34 of the 48 confirmed cases. When patients visit, they're given a mask to cover up. That's because the virus is so contagious that if you're exposed to it, and you don't have the vaccine, there's a 90% chance you'll contract it.

(to the doctor) Have you gone a day without having a new case?

- PS: We have gone zero days without having a new case.

Patsy Stinchfield is the director for infection control at Children's Minnesota Hospital. She says the measles outbreak started about 4 weeks ago. 46 of the 48 confirmed cases are in children 10 years old or younger.

- PS: I've just finished doing rounds on these children and they are miserable. They're in the hospital, they have IVs\*, they're not drinking, they have terrible coughs, some have pneumonia.

- The measles virus commonly travels through the air, where it can live for up to 2 hours, making it more contagious than the flu. The only vaccine available in the US to prevent the spread of the disease is the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella vaccine, or MMR.

- PS: one in a thousand children who get measles will have encephalitis – or infection in their brain. They can have permanent brain damage. They can have blindness or deafness. And so, we wouldn't vaccinate if this was just a rashy illness: this is a very serious disease.

In 2014, almost 90% of 2-year-old Minnesota children were vaccinated against measles. In the Somali community, that number plummeted to about 40%. Community leader Abdirizak Bihi says this is because of an unfounded fear spawned by anti-vaccine activists that MMR causes autism.

- AB: some parents, they said: "at least, measles is curable" – because they believe vaccine is causing autism. And they don't have a choice.

Iqra Mohammed is a Somali American mother of five children. Four have received the MMR vaccine, but she waited until they were older, even after getting measles herself.

- JY: Well, what was that like?

- IM: A lot of hospital stay.

Mohammed doesn't plan to vaccinate her five year old until he starts school in the fall.

- IM: There is this big decision to make, you know. Are you gonna choose to take the risk to vaccinate and get this long-term chronic illness? Or are you going to take the risk of trying to do everything that you can in your power to prevent your child from getting the measles? That's a very hard choice.

Doctors say false information linking vaccines to autism is hurting children.

- JY: Do you get frustrated that this misinformation still is out there?

- PS: It is frustrating because we know these diseases are contagious. They can spread, they can take children's lives and all we have to do is go back to before we had vaccines, where the United States had 4 million cases of measles. And we will go back there if we don't continue to vaccinate.

Scientific studies show there is no direct correlation between the MMR vaccine and an increased risk in autism, even in children who are at increased risk for the disorder. Now here in Minnesota, health officials say it could take months for this epidemic to be over. That's because they need at least six weeks with no new reported cases of measles for the outbreak to be considered finished. Gail.

-*Host*: Right, thank you, Jamie. Good information there. Thanks a lot.

*\*IV = intravenous*