

PROTECT OUR CHILDREN
By
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In a famous Supreme Court case in 1919 (*Schneck v. United States*), Justice Oliver Wendall Holmes, Jr. said that "the most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man falsely shouting fire in a crowded theater and causing panic." He went on to point out that such an action would endanger others and therefore to limit free speech would be appropriate.

Today, in California, we are facing a situation where the freedom of parents to choose not to immunize their children with the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine puts the children of other parents at risk of serious illness including high fever, runny nose, pneumonia, swelling of the brain and in 2 of every 1,000 cases, death. Statewide, there are 91 cases of measles in 2015, with two confirmed cases in Marin County. Some parents, relying upon research of the 1990's alleging a connection between the MMR vaccine and autism, have chosen not to protect their children through immunization. (It should be noted that the research has been discredited by the scientific community.)

While parents may have the statutory right of refusal, they do not have the ethical right to expose others to their children's lack of protection. In other words, having the right to do something does not mean it is always the right thing to do. Fifty years ago, children suffered from measles, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), smallpox, chickenpox, polio, typhoid, diphtheria, tuberculosis, scarlet fever and tetanus, to name a few childhood diseases. Today, most of these diseases have been virtually eliminated, due to the development of vaccines. Would any of us as parents or grandparents want to return to the "good old days?" Would any of us want to be responsible for the illness or death of our own child or the child of other parents because we refused to take advantage of available, proven, very low risk preventive measures? As noted in the *New York Times* on Sunday, February 1, 2015, "Measles can kill. Before vaccines for it became widespread in 1963, millions of Americans were infected annually and 400 to 500 died each year."

While the motives of those parents refusing to allow their children an MMR vaccine are no doubt based on their belief that their actions are the right thing to do, the greater good of the community demands that we take action to prevent any further spread of the measles in Marin County. Children (especially those less than 12-15 months old) and others in our community with compromised immune systems are at highest risk. Therefore, when so directed by the Marin County Public Health Officer, **if your child is unvaccinated or cannot provide laboratory confirmation of immunity and there is a case of measles in their school, they will be excluded from attending school for 21 days to protect themselves and to limit further spread of the disease.**

I want to be clear that I fully support the direction of our Public Health Officer. I also urge parents to carefully review the current research and, if your child or children are unvaccinated or under vaccinated, to take steps to protect your children immediately. You may have the right not to do so, but just as there is no right to "falsely cry fire in a crowded theater," there is no right to endanger other peoples' children. PLEASE GET YOUR CHILDREN VACCINATED!

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