

## Measles outbreak is a global challenge

It should not have taken measles landing on our doorstep for the vaccine discussion to grow so loud, but now that it has, it's time for Floridians and all Americans to look not just at immunizations in our own community, but at the big picture.

Already 2015 is on pace to be a record-setting year for measles in the U.S., with 141 confirmed cases in 17 states and Washington, D.C. Absent global action, that number could grow with frightening results.

Measles is highly contagious, and while it usually causes only a fever and a rash, it can also lead to pneumonia, brain damage, deafness and even death.

While measles is spreading here, by and large it is not originating here. Measles was largely eliminated in the U.S. in 2000, but every year a few cases are imported by overseas visitors and unvaccinated Americans returning from travel abroad. Measles is one of the leading causes of death among young children worldwide, despite the availability of a safe and cost-effective vaccine.

When vaccines can't or don't reach those who need them globally, outbreaks can occur. Parents wanting to protect their children and themselves should take a stand for this global problem. We can all encourage our elected officials to keep a steady drumbeat of support for global programs that provide vaccines to children in developing countries.

In 1980, measles was one of the most deadly childhood diseases in the world, causing an estimated 2.6 million deaths each year. Today, with support from global partners like the United Nations and its Children's Fund (UNICEF), it is affordable and manageable to provide vaccinations to families who want them, costing less than \$1 to vaccinate a child in a developing country.

In fact, through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. government is a founding partner of the Measles and Rubella Initiative, which has worked with the U.N. and others to meet a goal of reducing measles deaths by 95 percent by this year.

It's critical that the U.S. maintains a leadership role in the fight. When we look at the federal budget, our measles contribution represents barely a fraction of U.S. spending, but it has enormous impact. Immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases is one of the most cost-effective ways to stop the global spread of disease outbreaks — including on our shores.

There's no single solution to the current measles outbreak in the U.S., but clear solutions do exist to protect our families in Tallahassee and beyond. One of them must be ensuring children in developing countries have access to the vaccines they need through sustained global health funding.



Paula Kiger  
My View

Paula Kiger is a "wife of one, mom of two, and friend of many." She works for Weaving Influence and is a Shot at Life Champion Leader.