Emergency declared in NY over measles, unvaccinated barred from public spaces

Enlarge / HOPKINS, Minn. – APRIL, 27: Abdullahi Mohamud, 5, awaits returning to school after two of his siblings contracted the measles during an outbreak.

reader comments

196 with 114 posters participating

Share this story

Plagued by a tenacious outbreak of measles that began last October, New York's Rockland County declared a state of emergency Tuesday and issued a directive barring unvaccinated children from all public spaces.

Effective at midnight Wednesday, March 27, anyone aged 18 or younger who has not been vaccinated against the measles is prohibited from public spaces in Rockland for 30 days or until they get vaccinated. Public spaces are defined broadly in the directive as any places:

> *[W]here more than 10 persons are intended to congregate for purposes such as civic, governmental, social, or religious functions, or for recreation or shopping, or for food or drink consumption, or awaiting transportation, or for daycare or educational purposes, or for medical treatment. A place of public assembly shall also include public transportation vehicles, including but not limited to, publicly or privately owned buses or trains…*

The directive follows an order from the county last December that barred unvaccinated children from schools that did not reach a minimum 95-percent vaccination rate. That order—and the directive issued today—are intended to thwart the long-standing outbreak, which has sickened 153 people, mostly children.

“We must not allow this outbreak to continue indefinitely,” County Executive Ed Day said in a statement announcing the emergency declaration.

“Every action we have taken since the beginning of this outbreak has been designed to maximize vaccinations and minimize exposures. We are taking the next step in that endeavor today,” he explained. “We must do everything in our power to end this outbreak and protect the health of those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons and that of children too young to be vaccinated.”

The outbreak kicked off when an international traveler sick with the highly contagious viral illness arrived in the county late last September. It has largely spread among the county’s insular Orthodox Jewish community. However, other pockets of the county also have low vaccination rates, making them vulnerable.

Earlier this month, anti-vaccine parents appeared in federal court, bringing a lawsuit against the county alleging that banning their unvaccinated children from schools violated their religious freedom. The parents had used religious exemptions to opt their children out of standard vaccinations. The judge in the case denied their request to issue a temporary injunction that would let the children return to school.

But the lawsuit isn’t the only opposition the county has faced as it tries to stamp out the infections.

“As this outbreak has continued, our inspectors have begun to

meet resistance from those they are trying to protect. They have been hung up on or told not to call again. They've been told 'we're not discussing this, do not come back,' when visiting the homes of infected individuals as part of their investigations," Day noted in today's announcement. "This type of response is unacceptable and irresponsible. It endangers the health and wellbeing of others and displays a shocking lack of responsibility and concern for others in our community."

Rockland county is one of six locations nationwide currently experiencing an outbreak of measles. So far this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has tallied 314 confirmed cases of the disease from 15 states. The agency recorded 372 cases total for 2018 and just 120 in 2017.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1481783