

# **Unvaccinated Barred from public places as Rockland, NY declares state of emergency over measles outbreak**

ROCKLAND COUNTY, New York (WABC) -- Rockland County has declared a state of emergency over the ongoing measles outbreak, with Executive Ed Day announcing that non-vaccinated minors will be barred from public places.

Effective at midnight Wednesday, March 27, 2019, anyone who is under 18 years of age and is not vaccinated against the measles will be prohibited from public places until the declaration expires in 30 days or until they receive the MMR vaccination.

Officials said law enforcement will not be patrolling the streets or asking for vaccination records, but if someone is found in violation of the declaration, their case will be referred to the district attorney's office.

Parents will also be held accountable for their children if they are found in violation of the state of emergency.

Officials say there are no religious exemptions, and that they have been working with area rabbis who have been encouraging their members to get vaccinated.

According to the emergency declaration, public places are defined as a place where 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, but does not include taxi or livery vehicles.

There are currently 153 confirmed reported cases of measles in the county, according to health officials.

"As this outbreak has continued, our inspectors have begun to meet resistance from those they are trying to protect," Day said. "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. This type of response is unacceptable and irresponsible. It endangers the health and well-being of others and displays a shocking lack of responsibility and concern for others in our community."

Day said the intention of the state of emergency isn't to arrest people, but to educate the community and gain compliance.

"This is an opportunity for everyone in their community to do the right thing," Day said. "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 for the children too young to be vaccinated."

Day said he recognizes there are religious holidays coming up soon, but if people immediately comply with the state of emergency and vaccinate their children now, they will still be able to enjoy Easter and Passover with their friends and family.

"We want people to be able to celebrate," he said. "We don't want to see a repeat of how this outbreak started when we saw people gathered together and then fall ill last fall. We want everyone to enjoy their friends and families, something quite difficult with the specter of measles hanging over their heads."

Community leaders are urging vaccination. They say the resistance is not about religion, rather it's a lack of education.

They applaud the state's efforts thus far but have real fears about this latest step.

"Describe a B misdemeanor and someone can get arrested, that just sounds very scary to me," said community activist Rivkie Feiner.

"Being prejudiced and I'm very concerned about how people will be viewed and what will happen when people go to the mall and try to go to the Target or wherever they want to go shopping or be out," said Gary Setzer of the Jewish Federation and Foundation of Rockland County.

Meanwhile other leaders say the problem is the numbers.

"This community has a boatload of children," said Yossi Gestetner of the Orthodox Jewish Public Affairs Council. "To give you context, Manhattan less than 9% of the population is under the age of 10. New Square the Hasidic village, 40%."

The Rockland County Department of Health will host a free MMR vaccination clinic from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on Wednesday on the second floor of Building A, Robert L. Yeager Health Complex, 50 Sanatorium Road, Pomona, NY.

"We must not allow this outbreak to continue indefinitely," Day said. "We will not sit idly by while children in our community are at risk. This is a public health crisis, and it is time to sound the alarm, to ensure that everyone takes proper action to protect themselves and their neighbors; for the health and safety of all of us in Rockland."

High-risk groups include pregnant women, children under 6 months of age, the immunocompromised or immunosuppressed, those who have not been vaccinated against the measles, and those who were born before 1957 and are immunosuppressed

[RELATED: What to know about measles symptoms, vaccine and treatment](#)

Health officials say the best way to help protect yourself and the community is to remain up-to-date with measles vaccinations, and that high community vaccination rates help protect people who cannot get vaccinated because they are too young or have specific health conditions.

"We continue to encourage everyone to be up-to-date with the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine to help protect them in case of any future exposure to measles in Rockland," Health Commissioner Dr. Patricia Schnabel Ruppert said.

"Measles is highly contagious, so anyone who is not protected against measles is at risk of getting the disease, and they may spread measles to people who cannot get vaccinated because they are too young or have specific health conditions."

Free MMR vaccines are available by calling:

--The Rockland County Department of Health at 845-364-2497 or 845-364-2520 to schedule an appointment to get a free MMR vaccine at the Pomona health complex.

--The Rockland County Department of Health Spring Valley Family Planning Clinic is also providing MMR vaccines, by appointment to Family Planning patients. Family Planning Clinic patients can call 845-364-2531 to schedule an appointment.

In addition, MMR vaccines are available at local health care providers or by calling a local federally qualified health center.

The New York State Department of Health released the following statement:

*"From the onset of this outbreak, the State Department of Health has implemented a number of preventive measures to limit the further spread of measles. Together with the Rockland County Department of Health, we launched a successful school exclusion initiative for unvaccinated students in the outbreak area and, in partnership with the County and local healthcare providers, administered nearly 17,000 MMR vaccinations across the County - more than four times the number given over the same timeframe in each of the last two years. We are reviewing the County's emergency order and are continuing to work with all community stakeholders to end this outbreak once and for all."*