

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Pietro Lombardi ▼
EXPLORE THE APP

Europe Edition | September 16, 2019 | Print Edition | Video

Home World U.S. Politics Economy Business Tech Markets Opinion Life & Arts Real Estate WSJ Magazine 🔍

EUROPE

Measles Outbreak Plagues Europe's Young Adults

European health authorities struggle to reach a large pool of teenagers and young adults who were never vaccinated



Sorrel Kinton contracted measles when she was 19 years old. She spent two days in the hospital and a month recovering from the initial symptoms. MICHELLE SIU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Pietro Lombardi and Brittany Bernstein

July 4, 2019 11:38 am ET

Finn McLoughlin, a 20-year-old Briton, didn't receive a measles vaccine as a child because his mother believed there could be fatal

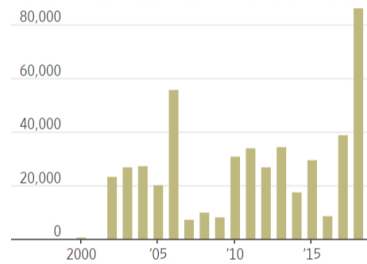


Sorrel Kinton contracted measles when she was 19 years old. She spent two days in the hospital and a month recovering from the initial symptoms. MICHELLE SIU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Pietro Lombardi and Brittany Bernstein

July 4, 2019 11:38 am ET

Finn McLoughlin, a 20-year-old Briton, didn't receive a measles vaccine as a child because his mother believed there could be fatal



Note: Data contain both suspect and confirmed cases in the WHO's European Region. Some countries might not have reported cases to WHO.

vaccinated against measles, according to figures from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, or ECDC, an independent agency of the European Union.

In the past two decades, millions of parents across



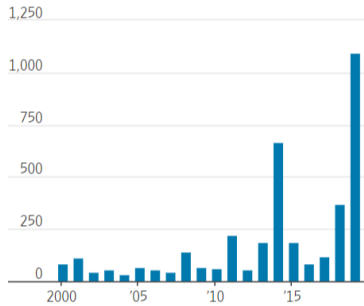
MORE FROM POLITICS
New Report on Brett Kavanaugh Reopens Debate About Supreme Court Justice

AA
TEXT

Source: WHO

Measles Cases in the U.S.

The U.S. is facing its worst measles outbreak since the disease was considered eliminated in 2000.



Note: 2019 figure as of June 27
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Europe have been influenced by antivaccination campaigns that helped create a large pool of unvaccinated adolescents and young adults. Now, as [Europe contends with a widespread measles outbreak](#)—a disease that seemed close to elimination just a few years ago—health officials are considering obligatory vaccines for school-age children. But they face a challenge in reaching unvaccinated teens and adults.

“You would expect measles in children,” said Nick Bundle, a specialist in vaccine-preventable diseases at the ECDC. “Measles is increasingly becoming a disease of adults in Europe.”

In the 30 countries surveyed by the ECDC, there were about 17,000 cases in 2018 and 18,000 in 2017, quadruple the 2016 figure. World Health Organization data showed about 83,000 cases last year in the region including Ukraine, where there was an outbreak of more than 50,000 cases, and other nations such as Russia and Israel.

Europe’s struggle comes as U.S. authorities are facing resistance to vaccines amid the worst outbreak since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000. Measles cases in the U.S. [hit the highest level since 1992](#); so far this year 1,095 cases have been reported in 28 states, with most cases in [unvaccinated children in ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities](#) in New York City and Rockland County, N.Y.



Ukraine reported an outbreak of more than 50,000 cases of measles last year. Here, doctors in the hallway of a measles ward at a clinic in Kiev. PHOTO: BRENDAN HOFFMAN/GETTY IMAGES

An underlying problem of the European outbreak was the fallout from the now-debunked 1998 study by British physician Andrew Wakefield that suggested a link between the MMR vaccine—which [inoculates against measles, mumps and rubella in two doses](#)—and autism.

Lasting Effect

The influence of a debunked 1998 study suggesting a link between the MMR vaccine and autism is still being felt.

Share who believe vaccines cause autism



“In Europe, we have a missed generation of unvaccinated children who are now adults, and we have no alternative” but find them and vaccinate

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

1. Four Candidates That Stood Out in the Democratic Presidential Debate
2. NBA’s Andre Iguodala on Investing, Kaepernick and Legacy
3. No-Deal Brexit: 3 Things to Know About the U.K.’s ‘Worst-Case Scenario’
4. Maria Sharapova on the Loneliness of Losing and Winning
5. Maysoon Zayid on Bringing Disability to the Mainstream

MOST POPULAR ARTICLES

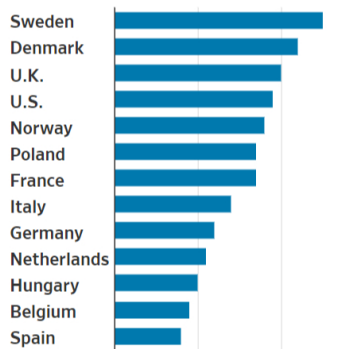
1. Saudi Oil Attack Is the Big One
2. U.S. Blames Iran for Attack on Saudi Oil Facilities
3. Your Parents’ Financial Advice Is (Kind Of) Wrong
4. New Report on Kavanaugh Reopens Debate
5. United Auto Workers Go on Strike at GM’s U.S. Factories

WSJ MEMBER MESSAGE: NEWSLETTER

What’s New on the WSJ Bookshelf

Get a quick, curated preview of everything from book reviews to WSJ’s best-seller list, delivered straight to your inbox.

[SIGN UP NOW](#)



them now, said Italian epidemiologist Vittorio Demicheli. “Otherwise, we’ll have measles outbreaks for decades.”

Source: IPSOS online survey of 500-1,000 adults in each country conducted Sept. 28-Oct. 17, 2017; margin of error: +/- 1 pct. pts.

AA
TEXT

The median age of measles patients in Europe has risen to 17 from 10 in the past decade. Between January 2016 and March 2019, individuals between 10 and 29 made up about 29% of measles cases, with the majority in those 20-29 years old, according to the ECDC. Those older than 30 accounted for roughly 20% of cases.

“This is quite striking compared with other countries,” Mr. Bundle said. For example, in the U.S., in cases reported between January and April the median age was 5, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Italy, where the number of babies receiving the first dose of the vaccine fell to 85% in 2015 amid antivaccine sentiment, had roughly 9,000 measles cases, including 13 deaths, reported between January 2016 and this past March, with a median age of 26.



Vika Mishinka, 21, was treated for measles at a medical clinic in Kiev, Ukraine, in May. PHOTO: BRENDAN HOFFMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Italy has made vaccines mandatory for school-aged children. It is considering requiring them for applicants for some public-sector jobs, or demanding vaccine certificates for enrollment in sports programs.

British authorities have advised young adults going to concerts and festivals to be vaccinated against measles. The Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts, which started June 26, suggested that attendees check their vaccination status. In 2016, officials linked 52 cases of measles with festivals, and 16 specifically to Glastonbury.

Many of these young adults grew up when vaccination rates across the

AA
TEXT

U.K. fell to just about 80% after the Wakefield study. Now, this large group of unvaccinated, active people has made it more difficult for authorities to track and control the problem.



With measles outbreaks continuing to rise as the summer travel season heats up, WSJ's Lorie Hirose takes a look at state vaccination laws and what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is doing to fight the disease. Photo Illustration: Laura Kammermann

Mr. Bundle said children are usually the main focus inoculation efforts. "There is no system in place to provide routine vaccinations to adults," he said.

Still, some young adults have had a change of opinion. Sorrel Kinton, 29, of Cambridge, U.K., was unconcerned about being unvaccinated until, at 19, she contracted measles. Her parents had made the decision to not vaccinate her due to fears it could cause brain damage.

Ms. Kinton spent two days in the hospital and a month recovering from the initial symptoms. She had to shelve plans to attend college that year to fully recover.

"If I had had a weaker immune system, it absolutely could have killed me," she said. "It's hard to resent somebody who you know was trying to act in your best interest, but I also lost a year of my life."



Ms. Kinton, now 29, says of her parents' decision: "It's hard to resent somebody who you know was trying to act in your best interest, but I also lost a year of my life." PHOTO: MICHELLE SIU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Since 1998, MMR anxieties have spread. A 2017 study by market-research company Ipsos Mori across 38 countries shows the lingering effect of the Wakefield study, finding nearly six in 10 people were either unsure or [believed there was a link between vaccines and autism](#).

"In the U.K. it took 15 years to recover to pre-Wakefield levels," said Heidi Larson, a director of a vaccine project at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Health officials recommend 95% inoculation to prevent outbreaks. In

Health officials recommend 90% vaccination to prevent outbreaks. In 2016 and 2017 the level was 92% in the U.K for the first dose, according to the World Health Organization.

European health authorities are struggling with ways to reach teenagers and adults like Mr. McLoughlin. According to ECDC data, a number of countries such as France and Germany have launched measles catch-up campaigns.

The German health minister recently proposed a law that would require proof of measles vaccinations for some education and medical professionals as well as for school enrollment. It would impose steep fines and possibly ban unvaccinated children from nursery schools. The law includes a budget of €5 million (\$5.6 million) a year to fund vaccine-education campaigns. The goal is to get it approved this year.

“In order to tackle the problem of adults, we want to remind them of the opportunity to vaccinate,” said Mr. Demicheli, who heads a vaccine advisory body for the Italian Health Ministry.

Write to Pietro Lombardi at Pietro.Lombardi@dowjones.com and Brittany Bernstein at Brittany.Bernstein@dowjones.com

WSJ opens select articles to reader conversation to promote thoughtful dialogue. See the 'Join the Conversation' area to the right for stories open to conversation. For more information, please reference our community guidelines. Email feedback and questions to moderator@wsj.com.

WHAT TO READ NEXT...



ASIA

The Hong Kong Protester's Toolkit for a Cat-and-Mouse Game With Authorities



JOURNAL REPORTS: HEALTH CARE

You've Survived Cancer. What Comes Next?



MARKETS

Stocks to Watch: Apple, JPMorgan, Caterpillar, Freeport-McMoRan and More

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Iran Rejects U.S. Accusations Over Saudi Oil-Facility Attacks



Amid Brexit, a Different Common Currency Is Raising a Ruckus



Value's Rebounding, but Don't Get Your Hopes Up



'Sign In With Apple' Is Way Better Than Passwords—If You Can Find It



As Gucci Tripped on Social Media, Sales Fell



Syrians Adopt Precautions From Home to Evade Arrest in Turkey



Junk Debt Sends Early Warning Signals



Netanyahu's Alliance With Trump Tests Israel's Bond with U.S. Jews



Companies Slow to Move Away From Libor



Strong U.S. Dollar Prompts Speculation of Trump Intervention





NOTABLE & QUOTABLE

Opinion | Notable & Quotable: What Democrats Aren't Looking For



WORK & FAMILY

When You Think Your Child's Teacher Is a Bad Fit

Independent of The Wall Street Journal newsroom

PERSONAL FINANCE

This 50-year-old dog walker retired after making more than \$1 million — working just three days a week

MarketWatch

MANSION GLOBAL ARTICLE

Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas Buy and Sell in the New York Suburbs

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Europe Edition ▾

WSJ Membership

WSJ+ Membership Benefits

Digital Subscriptions

Customer Service

Customer Center

Contact Us

Tools & Features

Emails & Alerts

Guides

Ads

Advertise

Community, Real Estate, Autos

More

About the Newsroom

Contact & Distribution



MORE FROM: POLITICS

New Report on Brett Kavanaugh
Reopens Debate About Supreme
Court Justice

