



National Association of County & City Health Officials

*The National Connection for Local Public Health*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Washington State Local Health Official Addresses Measles Outbreaks and Vaccines at Congressional Briefing**

*— Dr. Jeffrey Duchin of Seattle & King County highlights role local health departments play in ending outbreaks and improving vaccination coverage —*

**Washington, DC, October 16, 2019** — Today, the [National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) (NACCHO) partnered with the American Academy of Pediatrics, Adult Vaccine Access Coalition, Biotechnology Innovation Organization, Trust for America’s Health, and Vaccinate Your Family to hold a congressional briefing, “Preventing Outbreaks: Working Together to Increase Vaccine Confidence.” The briefing examined the role of public health and other stakeholders in preventing and responding to outbreaks, and what policymakers can do to strengthen vaccine acceptance and access. NACCHO is the voice of the nation’s nearly 3,000 local health departments on the front lines of infectious disease outbreak and response.

Dr. Jeffrey Duchin, Health Officer for Public Health-Seattle and King County, WA, discussed the recent measles outbreaks in Washington State, as well as the role of local health departments in preventing, identifying, tracking, and addressing outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. He also discussed the high cost of these time intensive, preventable outbreaks, which draw personnel and resources away from other public health priorities.

“Good immunization policy will always be important but it is important to remember that having systems in place to effectively implement that policy and address potential outbreaks—especially at the local level—is just as important,” said Dr. Duchin.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of October 3, 2019, 1,250 individual cases and 22 outbreaks of measles have been confirmed in 31 states. This is an increase of nearly 900 reported cases from the previous year, and the greatest number of reported cases the U.S. has seen since 1992. In addition to the surge in measles cases across the country, there has also been an increase in reports of other long-term, vaccine-preventable illnesses. The CDC reported that each year, nearly 900,000 people contract pneumococcal pneumonia, causing upwards of 400,000 hospitalizations and 19,000 deaths. Between 700,000 to 1.4 million people have chronic hepatitis B, with complications including liver cancer. Further, during the 2017-2018 flu season, there were 49 million cases of the flu, over 950,000 hospitalizations, and 80,000 flu-related deaths.

Vaccine-preventable illnesses are more likely to spread and result in outbreaks in U.S. communities and groups where people are unvaccinated. Despite improvements in the availability and accessibility of vaccines, an increase in vaccine hesitancy and resistance among individuals and families has contributed to the uptick in vaccine-preventable outbreaks throughout the country.

The Washington Department of Health reported that 2019 had the state’s highest number of confirmed measles cases since 1990, with two measles outbreaks and 86 individual cases. Nearly 61 percent of the cases were under 10 years of age, and youth ages 11 through 18 accounted for 20 percent of the cases. Nearly 80 percent had not been vaccinated against measles, and only 5 percent had a complete vaccination. King County alone reported 12 of the confirmed cases of measles in 2019.

In response to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable illnesses in Washington and other states across the country, Reps. Kim Schrier, MD (D-WA) and Michael Burgess, MD(R-TX) cosponsored the Vaccine Awareness Campaign to Champion Immunization Nationally and Enhance Safety (VACCINES) Act (H.R.2862). The purpose of the VACCINES Act of 2019 is to develop and implement a national system for surveillance of vaccine rates to identify communities at-risk of vaccine-preventable illnesses, authorize research on vaccine

hesitancy, and increase public awareness of the importance of immunizations. Reps. Schrier and Burgess will attend today's briefing.

NACCHO reiterates its strong support of the VACCINES Act and continues to urge all levels of government and community stakeholders to work together to address misinformation about vaccine safety and improve vaccine education across the lifespan.

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**About NACCHO**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nation's nearly 3,000 local health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities. For more information about NACCHO, please visit [www.naccho.org](http://www.naccho.org).