

EDITORIAL

## NYC's outbreak a warning for LI

70-plus local schools have low rates of immunizations for measles

Mayor Bill de Blasio declared a public health emergency in New York City on Tuesday due to a measles outbreak that includes 285 cases. Alarmingly, that brings the statewide total to more than 400. New York is one of 19 states dealing with measles outbreaks.

But this scare isn't only about ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn or Rockland counties, where cases are concentrated.

A Newsday editorial board examination of state Health Department data from the 2017-18 school year found that more than 70 Long Island schools — both private and public — have so many unvaccinated students that they fall below the minimum 96 percent vaccination rate recommended by the state. (See our database at [newsday.com/immunizations](http://newsday.com/immunizations).)

There are private schools from Garden City to Riverhead with vaccination rates that hover at 50 to 60 percent. There's one tiny religious school that educates fewer than two dozen students, none of whom are immunized. And there are larger nonreligious schools where more than a third of students claimed a religious exemption, allowing them to remain unvaccinated.

There is no debate here. This is a public health crisis, the welfare of children and vulnerable adults is at stake and there's a way to stop it: New Yorkers must be immunized. All it takes is one case for measles to spread rapidly through communities with lower vaccination rates. Unvaccinated kids, even if they're in private schools, can expose others anywhere they go, from Little League to the supermarket.

To achieve what's known as "herd immunity," and best protect the entire population, the state Health Department says each school should reach a 96 percent vaccination rate. The 70 schools on Long Island that fall below that rate are mostly private, but also include schools in 17 public districts, including Huntington, Hauppauge, Great Neck and Cold Spring Harbor.

Among public schools with lower vaccination rates are those in districts including Wyandanch, Roosevelt and Hempstead, where immigration plays a huge role. In some cases, schoolchildren lack paperwork to prove they're immunized; in others, they got only one shot instead of two, or none at all. A joint effort by the schools, local health clinics, and state and county health departments is necessary to inform parents, encourage immunization, and provide more vaccination opportunities in and near schools.

Still, New York State makes it too easy to avoid immunizing young children. The state's so-called religious exemption is often used not for religious reasons, but because parents believe misinformation or don't trust government officials. In part, these are reasons for the state's outbreak. Anonymous groups are circulating pamphlets in Orthodox Jewish communities that scare parents, even taking Jewish law out of context to try to back their false claims.

Beyond that, state lawmakers must pass legislation that would end all exemptions except for a medical one. State health officials must continue to help school districts with challenges rooted in immigration.

And Long Island should learn from the ongoing outbreak.

Don't assume your school or your community is immune. There is only one real course of action: Vaccinate. — *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



■ See more Matt Davies cartoons: [newsday.com/matt](http://newsday.com/matt)

LETTERS

Victoria Ruvolo's project should go on

Thank you for publishing a beautiful article about our sister, Victoria Ruvolo ["Turkey toss victim dies," News, March 28]. Thank you also for your excellent reporting of her remarkable story years ago. By conveying the generosity of her beautiful spirit to the public, Newsday and other media helped her to profoundly inspire untold thousands of people.

Victoria's generosity was more than just a story, and very far from one off in a courtroom. She made countless speeches after her recovery from the serious injuries she suffered when a turkey was thrown at her moving car in 2004.

She encouraged others to find forgiveness in their hearts. She spoke to groups of young people, her amazing impact evidenced by

their hundreds of heartfelt letters. Week after week, she engaged with offenders in the Suffolk County probation department's TASTE program — Thinking errors, Anger management, Social skills, Talking and Empathy — the project she participated in with psychologist Robert Goldman. As the proxy victim in the room, she enabled offenders to feel the consequences of their actions. She became passionate about restorative justice, and she and Goldman co-wrote the book "No Room for Vengeance." This was a highlight of her life.

We hope the TASTE program can continue. May Victoria's untimely death remind people of the fine example she set and that programs like TASTE have a place in public life.

Jo Marie Brennan,  
Rita Dierna,  
Oceanside

Talk of miscarriage could help others

My heart goes out to Hilaria Baldwin, wife of actor Alec Baldwin. She said on social media she might be having a miscarriage. If I could come up with the words to bring comfort, I would. Instead, I would like to address a reader who thought it was wise to tell Baldwin to limit what she posts on social media, and that we really don't need to know ["Please, it's too much information," Letters, April 8].

It was brave of Baldwin to tell of her personal tragedy. If talking about it brings her some sort of meaning, whether it be cathartic closure or otherwise, who are we to say keep it to yourself? We should also keep in mind that her statement lets other victims of loss know that it's OK to reach out for help.

Tom Curry,  
Elmont