

---

Originally published February 13, 2019 at 3:32 pm

## To keep all children safe, we must support the elimination of measles everywhere

By [Susan Tyler](#)

*Special to The Times*

Gov. Jay Inslee declared a public health state of emergency Jan. 25 in response to a measles outbreak that has sickened at least 49 people, mostly children. Officials in Clark County, where the outbreak began, warned that this outbreak could last for months.

I'm frustrated that our state, home to so many high-tech industries, is dealing with a problem that is easily preventable with a low-tech solution – vaccines.

No child should suffer from measles when a lifesaving vaccine exists. I'll never forget traveling to Uganda with the UN Foundation's Shot@Life campaign last August. While there, I spoke with a mother who walked hours to bring her baby to a vaccine clinic. She told me of the comfort and relief that came with knowing her child would be protected.

Beyond discomfort, measles can result in serious, life-changing complications, including pneumonia, swelling of the brain or death. I want parents everywhere to have access to vaccines so they can be secure in knowing their children are protected. Yet, we are still far from this reality – nearly 300 children under the age of 5 die every day from measles.

It's clear we must invest in preventing measles to begin with – otherwise, the costs of containing and treating outbreaks when they occur are far too high. In 2016, an outbreak in Clallam County caused the death of a young woman who was immuno-compromised and led to more than [\\$223,000 in direct public-health costs](#) alone. We need to remain vigilant in the face of threats like measles, and here's why: Contagious diseases like measles don't respect borders. Although the U.S. eliminated measles in 2000 as the result of a safe, effective and affordable vaccine, we are seeing a resurgence of measles as travelers and visitors continue to bring it into the country and the number of unvaccinated children in the U.S. continues to rise.

For our community, possible exposure could have spread from the Portland Trail Blazers game and the Portland International Airport. As the daily count of measles goes up, we are seeing just how fast measles can travel.

To keep all children safe, we must support the elimination of measles everywhere. I'm thankful for global partnerships such as the [Measles & Rubella Initiative](#). It has helped deliver more than 2 billion doses of the measles vaccine and produced real results: Measles deaths dropped by 80 percent between 2000 and 2017.

It's time we double down on this progress. The U.S. has been a leader in the global fight against measles. Elected officials in Washington, D.C., need to continue strong funding for measles prevention and other health risks. It's our global responsibility – and it's a fight we can win.

Plus, we can make measles elimination a reality with minimal investment. The U.S. allocates about 1 percent of its budget to foreign aid – and just a fraction of this funds global-health programs. For less than what we spend at Starbucks in a week, we could vaccinate a child against the four most deadly diseases for children under 5, including measles.

That is why I'm urging my representative, Dr. Kim Schrier, D-Issaquah, and our senators to support robust funding for childhood immunizations. Every child should have the chance to lead a healthy life, both here and abroad.

**Susan Tyler** is a mother of two who resides in Auburn and is an advocate for the UN Foundation's Shot@Life campaign.