

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Ten Dreaded Diseases Reappear”

We have witnessed a reappearance of many dreaded diseases. Once effective treatment or prevention exists for a disease, the hope is that the disease will fade from public health. But illnesses don't always go away and can lurk in the shadows only to later re-emerge. Some of these diseases reappear because people fail to get vaccinated while others evolve to become more virulent and resistant to current treatments. Let's look at 10 diseases that have been making a comeback in recent years. 1) **Syphilis**. Syphilis used to be a lot less prevalent, but this sexually-transmitted infection (caused by *Treponema pallidum*) has been on the rise in the 21st century. Fortunately, syphilis is susceptible to treatment with penicillin. 2) **Measles**. With more parents foregoing vaccination for their children, measles has again reared its ugly head. Just in 2019 so far, 79 cases have already been reported—compared with 63 cases in the entire year of 2010, according to the CDC. 3) **Plague**. Plague—or the “Black Death” as it was referred to in the Middle Ages—is making a comeback in the developing world and in parts of the United States, including Idaho, California, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. Plague is usually spread by infected rat fleas and can manifest in one of three forms: bubonic (lymph node infection), pneumonic (lung infection), or septicemic (blood infection). 4) **Scarlet fever**. Scarlet fever has re-emerged in the United Kingdom in the past few years, and experts worry that the disease could jump the pond to the United States. Scarlet fever is contagious but is easily treated with antibiotics. 5) **Mumps**. Cases of mumps are on the rise because fewer people are getting vaccinated. Mumps cases reached a recent high of 6,366 cases nationwide in 2016. 6) **Gonorrhea**. In 2018, super gonorrhea that is resistant to azithromycin and ceftriaxone—the last effective dual antibiotic therapy routinely available—cropped up in the United Kingdom, and experts expect that it will make its way to the States. Super gonorrhea is only susceptible to big-gun antibiotics typically found in hospitals. Gonorrhea infection and transmission can be prevented with condoms. 7) **Chlamydia**. Chlamydia is gonorrhea's partner in crime and, oftentimes, these two bacterial diseases will co-infect. 8) **Whooping cough**. Pertussis, or whooping cough, is making a comeback—much like other illnesses caused by viruses that are preventable with vaccines. 9) **Tuberculosis**. Tuberculosis results in serious lung infection, which is spread by respiratory droplets in the air. It has rebounded after two decades of decline. And, 10) **Gout**. Gout has more than doubled in the United States during the past 20 years.

In the America that I love, we must keep our vaccinations current and quickly treat contagious diseases.

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