

Worst U.S. measles outbreak in 20 years

By Tony Pugh, McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON – After declaring in 2000 that measles had been eliminated from the U.S. through a successful vaccination program, government officials now say the number of confirmed cases has reached a 20-year high as people who get the disease abroad bring it back to America.

Unvaccinated Americans and foreign visitors who traveled to the Philippines, Europe, Africa and Asia are the main culprits in a growing spike of U.S. measles cases that began several years ago and exploded this year.

As of last month, 288 cases have been reported in 18 states, the highest year-to-date total since 1994, when 963 cases were reported by year's end. Ninety-seven percent – 280 – of the 2014 U.S. cases were imported from other countries.

A highly contagious viral respiratory disease that grows in cells at the back of the throat and lungs, measles is spread through the air by coughing, sneezing and even breathing. It can cause fever and coldlike symptoms, along with a stubborn rash.

Read the whole story