Vaccinate your child to keep measles at bay

Joyce Teo

Measles has been an uncommon disease since Singapore introduced compulsory vaccinations in 1985. But last year, Dr Low Kah Tzay, a paediatrician at Mount Elizabeth Hospital, saw a patient with the extremely contagious disease. He was 11 months old and had yet to be vaccinated. “He had a very high fever, rashes and seizures, and was admitted to hospital for 10 days,” Dr Low said.

“His parents were not sure where he contracted the disease.” Fortunately, he recovered fully.

Most people who are infected with measles do eventually recover completely, but a small group may develop serious complications.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) recently reminded families that 14 out of 34 measles cases reported in children here in the first 20 weeks of this year occurred because they had missed their measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination.

The children were aged one to six years old. Half of the children infected with measles were under one year old and not yet due for their first MMR vaccination, while three were under five years old.

Measles is highly contagious. Anyone who is not protected against it can get infected. Those at high risk of severe illness include infants and children aged less than five, and adults who were not vaccinated as children.

Adults who are not vaccinated can get measles if they come into contact with infected individuals, said Dr Low. Adults who were vaccinated as children may still get it if they come into contact with someone with measles, as the vaccine may not be completely effective in all people.

Measles is still common in many developing countries, particularly in parts of Africa and Asia, said the World Health Organisation.

As symptoms in adults are less severe, they may not seek medical attention, said Dr Low. They may infect children, particularly those under 12 months of age who are too young to be vaccinated.

Vaccinations must be repeated for babies, who usually carry antibodies that their mothers have passed on to them. These antibodies interfere with measles vaccines, like the MMR, and prevent a proper response to the vaccine to adequately protect babies.

Dr Chan Poh Chong, head and senior consultant, division of general ambulatory paediatrics at the National University Hospital, advised adults to go for vaccinations if they have not been vaccinated before, have an unknown vaccination history or do not have documented immunity.

Those who had measles as a child or had previously received two doses of MMR do not need to be vaccinated again, he said.

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The vast majority of the world’s child labor is estimated to occur in agriculture, with hundreds of millions of children working in fields and plantations across Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

In these regions, children are often subjected to long hours of intensive manual labor, with little to no protective gear or safety measures. They are exposed to harsh working conditions, including extreme temperatures, hazardous chemicals, and physical dangers.

Children under the age of 18 are frequently forced to work under these conditions to support their families, often at the expense of their education, health, and development.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are approximately 65 million children engaged in hazardous child labor worldwide.

Hazardous child labor includes work that is physically demanding, exposes children to health risks, or involves the handling of dangerous materials. This can include work in construction, mining, garment manufacturing, and the production of hazardous chemicals.

The ILO has set global targets to reduce child labor, with the aim of eliminating the worst forms of child labor by 2025 and ending all forms of child labor by 2030.

However, progress towards these targets has been slow, particularly in the face of globalization and the increase in informal economic activities.

Governments, businesses, and civil society organizations must work together to address the root causes of child labor, including poverty, lack of education, and the need for income.

We need to shift our priorities and invest in policies that uplift the lives of the most vulnerable, ensuring that every child has the right to a safe and healthy childhood.