

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Get your shots now

Recent outbreaks of measles in the United States should serve notice of the risks to people who are not vaccinated.

An outbreak of measles in Disneyland in California has now surpassed 80 cases. And Arizona public health officials say as many as 1,000 people across three counties may have been exposed to the measles virus, tied in part to those who may have come in contact with 195 children who Maricopa County health officials say were exposed to measles between Jan. 20 and 21 at the Phoenix Children’s East Valley Center in Mesa.

Two cases in Arizona are linked to the linked to the family of four whose measles cases were confirmed last week following travel to Disneyland.

Measles can cause blindness, deafness and even death — especially in young children.

So who cares if someone decides not to vaccinate their child? They put those who can’t receive vaccines and infants under 12 months at risk. Even in the vaccinated population, about 5 percent aren’t immune, according to the Centers for Disease Control, which estimates communities need a more than 90 percent vaccination rate to stop outbreaks.

But the risk is not just in other states. The University of Minnesota confirmed a case of measles on its Twin Cities campus Wednesday.

And while Minnesota’s not at the bottom of the pile when it comes to vaccination rates, it must clearly must do better. The CDC reports between 85 and 96 percent of Minnesota children are vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella. The national average is 91.9 percent. Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia have

higher average MMR vaccination rates than Minnesota. The top state is New Hampshire, where between 94 and 99 percent of children have MMR vaccination — rates for which all states should strive.

Boosting compliance among those who do not vaccinate could have major public health implications, especially because last year the United States had its highest number of measles cases since 1977, according to a report.

Rep. Mike Freiberg, DFL-Golden Valley, planned to introduce a bill at the Minnesota Legislature this week requiring parents to talk with a doctor about the diseases that can be prevented by vaccines before they can reject immunizing their children.

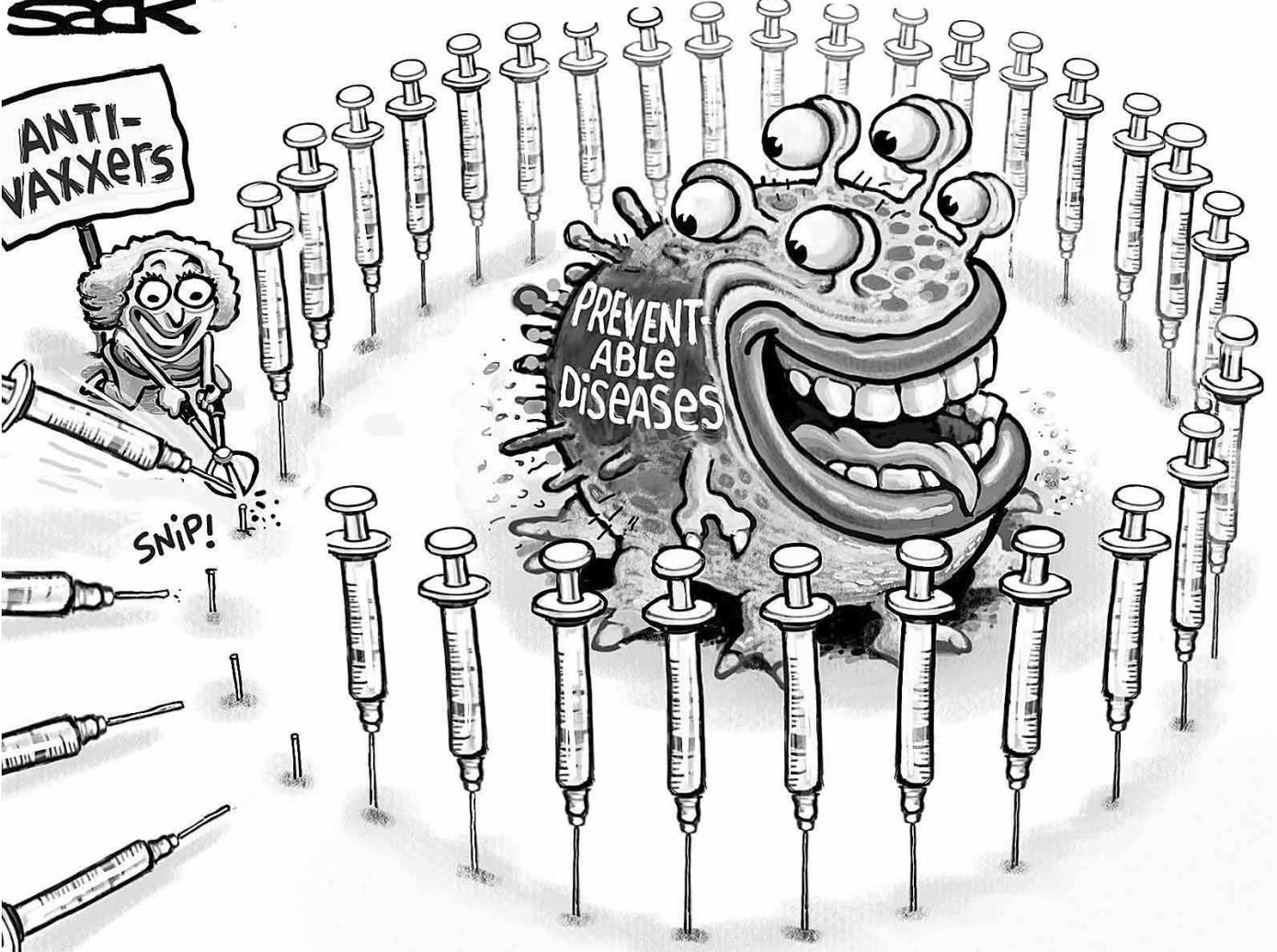
The idea behind immunization is that if most people in a population are immune to a disease, it can’t spread easily even if someone with the disease arrives on the scene. When less people are immunized and vulnerable, it becomes easier for a disease to take hold of a community.

Minnesota law requires children to be immunized, with exemptions: If a health care provider signs a statement that the vaccine would be harmful to the child, or that the child is already immune; and if parents sign and notarize a form that vaccination would be against their beliefs.

Freiberg’s bill would add another hurdle to jump before parents could opt out of vaccinating their children.

As we watch other states brace for the risk of a full outbreak, Freiberg’s bill deserves consideration and we urge parents to do the right thing for themselves and their community by keeping themselves and their children properly vaccinated.

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GUEST COLUMN

Let’s focus on sustained and strategic transportation funding

BY SCOTT BRENER

We agree with Gov. Mark Dayton: Let’s get real about transportation. Minnesotans demand safe and efficient movement of people and goods. Our existing dedicated revenues fall short of maintaining our system of roads, bridges and transit, let alone allowing for strategic expansion.

The Legislature should pass a 10-year plan funded by efficient use of current resources, general fund appropriations and value capture mechanisms.

The first reality check, however, is to agree on how much we need to invest. What are the real numbers?

In 2012, the Transportation Finance Advisory Committee projected we needed \$250 million/year to “maintain” our state roads and bridges. Today, Gov. Dayton says we need \$400 million.

In 2012, TFAC projected we needed \$210 million/year to build out the Twin Cities transit system. Today, Gov. Dayton says we need \$280 million.

In 2012, TFAC projected that the metro area transit system could be built out in the next 20 years

– only if we increased the metro area sales tax by a half-cent. Today, planning documents from the Counties Transit Improvement Board and the Metropolitan Council project that the expansion can be completed with current revenues in the next 10 years.

Once we agree on the priorities, we do need to get real about funding. Solutions advanced by the governor and transportation special-interests are well meaning but sorely outdated.

Gas-tax revenues are declining in value with more efficient and electric cars. Current user fees – fuel taxes, vehicle registration fees and the motor vehicle sales tax – do not capture any money from those who use the system but will never buy or operate a vehicle.

The proposed new gross receipts tax on gas – assessing the 6.5-percent sales tax at the wholesale level – is not transparent to consumers. The assessment will wind up in significantly higher prices at the pump. And projected revenues are far from stable. At \$2 per-gallon gas prices, the tax would increase the cost at the pump by about 12

cents. At \$4, it’s more than 25 cents. The governor’s current proposal is based on gas at \$3.25 per gallon.

We must invest in a way that does not make our cost of doing business any less competitive than it is today. Minnesota last increased its gas tax in July 2012. We also raised significant sales, income and corporate taxes to the tune of \$2.1 billion less than two years ago.

Someone must ask: Are other government services any less long term and in need of stable funding than transportation? If the answer is “no,” then why is it appropriate to fund, say, health care services with those dollars but not transportation? Thirty-three states use the general fund to supplement financing for state roads and bridges. This also could force everyone to redouble efforts to redesign the delivery of all state programs and services.

We should be exploring new funding mechanisms like value capture, too. Large public investments in transportation infrastructure – such as new freeway interchanges, highways or transit lines – can increase the value of adjacent private land, sometimes substantially. Research at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Transportation Studies shows that assessing a portion of a project’s cost against those who most directly benefit can contribute significant dollars.

Business owners and managers usually identify education, public safety and transportation as the most important state services. Yet, outside of small annual appropriations for transit, transportation does not show up on the balance sheet of the general fund.

The Minnesota Chamber supports a new 10-year investment plan – that’s 2016 to 2026, not 1966 to 1976. First, let’s have a meaningful conversation to reach consensus about what we need to invest. Second, let’s get practical – and creative – about how to fund it. Our goal is a transportation system that facilitates a changing and growing economy. We need an investment and funding strategy that’s up to this task.

Brener, senior vice president and general counsel at SFM, Bloomington, is chair of the Minnesota Chamber’s Transportation Policy Committee.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Transportation needs back-to-basics plan

To the editor,

This is in regard to Governor Dayton’s announced transportation funding plan:

The “transportation solution” would be much easier to sell to Minnesota’s citizens and industry if those who pay the bill through their motor fuel and vehicle registration/vehicle license taxes had an upfront, iron-clad guarantee by the governor and Legislature that all new transportation dollars would flow only to professional engineering-

justified pavement and bridge replacement and maintenance.

Further, it is essential that there be a fail-safe mechanism to prevent the politically driven redirection of funds for non-pavement/non-bridge uses like bikeways, hiking trails, scenic byway development and amenities, community beautification enhancements, scenic overlooks, historical monuments, community entrance aesthetic treatments and countless other non-pavement/non-bridge purposes.

In my respectful view, a new transportation funding plan must focus only on the basic needs of our roadways and bridges, with timely and proactive system preventative maintenance being a top-most priority.

Indeed, what is sorely needed is a back-to-the-basics Marshall Plan, insulated from capricious political whimsy, to bring our bridges and highways to 21st century safety and serviceability expectations of the motoring public.

This means no frills,

bling, or wasteful special interest “visions” ... just well maintained, strong/smooth/safe pavements and structurally sound and safe bridges, predicated on the common-sense guidance of professional civil engineering standards.

John Bray
Duluth, MN

Editor’s note: Bray served as special assistant to the district 1 engineer and spokesman for the Minnesota Department of Transportation and is now retired.

The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author’s city address will be published. Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifallsjournal.com.