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Surgeon general: Measles vaccine is safe and effective

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As the debate over measles vaccination intensifies among parents and politicians, the newly appointed U.S. surgeon general is directing the public to the facts.

"I think what we need to focus on in this conversation is the science because the science ultimately, more than personal anecdotes and more than anything else, should drive our decisions as individuals and as families," Dr. Vivek Murthy said Wednesday on "CBS This Morning" in his first television interview since being appointed.

His comments come on the heels of those by Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul on CNBC Monday, where Paul said, "I have heard of many tragic cases of walking, talking normal children who wound up with profound mental disorders after vaccines."



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CDC chief: Vaccines are the best way to prevent measles

While Murthy said he understands parents' concern and desire to do what's best for the child, he added, "what science tells us very clearly is that the best way to protect your child and to protect other children and other members of the community is to get vaccinated. It's safe and effective."

The two recommended doses of the vaccine would increase a person's protection rate by 97 percent, Murthy said. In contrast, an unvaccinated person would have 90 percent chance of catching the virus upon exposure.

Murthy, who made history as the first person of Indian descent and the youngest to hold the position, said he's also concerned about the number of outbreaks in states with personal health or religious exemptions for vaccines. The 92 percent

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vaccination rate in the U.S. is high, but Murthy said exemptions are increasing in clusters throughout the country.

"When you're in a pocket with low vaccination rates, that's when you find yourself at greater risk of getting measles," Murthy said.

There are at least 131 cases of the measles spanning 14 states. On Monday, a **day care center in Santa Monica, California, closed** after a baby tested positive for the virus.

"The good news about this is we know how to eliminate measles, and at the heart of that strategy is getting vaccinated," Murthy said.

As surgeon general, Murthy becomes the chief spokesman on the country's public health issues, so he was also asked about **marijuana legalization**, another health debate unfolding in the U.S.

Murthy pointed again to the science behind "the efficacy of marijuana," but did not specifically address his stance on the issue.

"We have some preliminary data showing that for certain medical conditions and symptoms, marijuana can be helpful, so I think we have to use that data to drive policy-making, and I'm very interested to see where that data takes us," Murthy said.

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