



MIDEAST CONFLICT

**ISRAEL
EXPANDS
TARGETS**

Strikes take aim at
Iranian energy
production facilities,
manufacturing plants

A5



AP / GEORGE WALKER IV

A law enforcement officer during the
search in Belle Plaine, Minn., on Sunday.

MINNESOTA SHOOTINGS

**GUNMAN
CAUGHT:
OFFICIALS**

Suspect arrested in
attacks on lawmakers,
spouses that killed two,
injured two others

A4

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

**PARENTS
PUSH BACK
ON VACCINES**

Growing number on LI question or refuse immunizations
for common childhood diseases, local pediatricians say

A2-3 | [UPDATES AT NEWSDAY.COM](#)



Vaccinations for diseases such as
measles and whooping cough are
mandatory for public school children.

AP / MARY CONLON

HOW TO HAVE A FASHIONABLE SUMMER

EXPLORE LI

Rochell Bishop Sleets
Editor
631-843-3702
rochell.sleets@newsday.com

Doug Dutton
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-4650
doug.dutton@newsday.com

Shawna VanNess
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-3264
shawna.vanness@newsday.com

Tracy M. Brown
Assistant Managing Editor
Special Sections
631-843-2312
tracy.brown@newsday.com

Thomas Kupper
Assistant Managing Editor
Government and Politics
631-843-3935
thomas.kupper@newsday.com

Monica Quintanilla
Assistant Managing Editor
Public Safety, Crime, Courts
631-843-2917
monica.quintanilla@newsday.com

Jeffrey L. Williams
Assistant Managing Editor
Features
631-843-3630
jeffrey.williams@newsday.com

Monte R. Young
Assistant Managing Editor
Newsroom Multimedia
631-843-2102
monte.young@newsday.com

Baird Helgeson
Managing Editor
631-843-3118
baird.helgeson@newsday.com

Robert Shields
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-4795
robert.shields@newsday.com

Ben Weller
Senior Assistant Managing Editor
Long Island News
631-843-2715
benjamin.weller@newsday.com

Ade Emmanuel
Assistant Managing Editor
Business
631-843-3161
ade.emmanuel@newsday.com

Keith Herbert
Assistant Managing Editor
Investigations
631-843-3478
keith.herbert@newsday.com

Robert Levin
Assistant Managing Editor
Breaking News
631-843-3108
robert.levin@newsday.com

Hank Winnicki
Assistant Managing Editor
Sports
631-843-4832
hank.winnicki@newsday.com

Joye Brown
Associate Editor, Columnist
631-843-2911
joye.brown@newsday.com

MULTIMEDIA

Robert Cassidy
Executive Director Multimedia
631-843-3027
bobby.cassidy@newsday.com

John Keating
Director Multimedia Newsgathering
631-843-5482
john.keating@newsday.com

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TOP STORIES

DOCTORS: LI PARENTS

More are declining or delaying shots required for school

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

BY ROBERT BRODSKY
AND LISA L. COLANGELO

robert.brodsky@newsday.com
lisa.colangelo@newsday.com

An increasing number of Long Island parents are questioning, resisting or refusing to vaccinate their infants and young children for common childhood diseases such as measles, whooping cough and hepatitis, or delaying the schedule of immunization, according to some pediatricians.

The reluctance comes amid a tumultuous period in Washington, as Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a prominent vaccine skeptic who serves as President Donald Trump's Health and Human Services secretary, last week removed all 17 members of a scientific committee that advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on how to use vaccines.

On Wednesday, Kennedy named eight new members to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, including a nurse who critics contend has spread misinformation about vaccines and a researcher who has suggested the COVID-19 vaccine caused a form of the AIDS virus.

Fears of impending 'crisis'

Dr. Bruce Gerberg, a Huntington Station pediatrician, said vaccine reluctance was, until recently, largely limited to the COVID-19 and influenza vaccines, which are voluntary and not required for students to attend public schools.

But in recent months, and particularly since the start of the second Trump administration, he's met with an increasing number of parents who are declining or postponing vaccinations that are mandatory for public school children.

They include infant and childhood vaccinations for polio, tetanus, measles, hepatitis B and whooping cough, and for older youths meningitis and



Physicians on Long Island have seen greater resistance by parents to vaccinating children, or doing so on the recommended schedule.

GETTY IMAGES / JAN SONNENMAIR

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

■ **An increasing number of Long Island parents** are questioning, resisting or refusing to vaccinate their infants and young children for common childhood diseases such as measles, whooping cough and hepatitis, or delaying the schedule of immunization, some pediatricians tell Newsday.

■ **The reluctance comes amid a tumultuous period in Washington**, as Robert F.

Kennedy Jr., a prominent vaccine skeptic, last week removed all 17 members of a scientific committee that advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on how to use vaccines.

■ **But in recent months, a pediatrician said**, he has met with an increasing number of parents who are declining or postponing vaccinations that are mandatory for public school children.

HPV, Gerberg said.

"In the past it would be once every few months where somebody doesn't want to give their child anything," Gerberg, who is part of Allied Physician Group, said of childhood vaccines. "Now we see it every day. We see at least one patient's parent that refuse all the vaccines."

Those parents, Gerberg said, are provided with a host of medical information about the safety and importance of vaccinations and asked to sign a consent form advising them of the risks. The parents, he said, are also told their children will be ineligible to attend public school without these mandatory vaccinations.

Gerberg fears the trend will lead to a public health "crisis" for the region and the country.

"As pediatricians, we know what's good for the patients,"

he said, adding the risk extends to infants and young children who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated for certain diseases but may come into contact with unvaccinated youths. "These vaccines have shown they're safe and that they could save people's lives."

'Powerless to stop this'

A Health and Human Services spokeswoman said in a statement: "Secretary Kennedy is not anti-vaccine — he is pro-safety, pro-transparency, and pro-accountability. His long-standing advocacy has focused on ensuring that vaccines and all medical interventions meet the highest standards of safety and are backed by gold standard science. He believes the American people deserve radical transparency — not censorship — so they can make truly informed deci-

PUSH BACK AGAINST VACCINATIONS



Dr. Bruce Gerberg says immunization reluctance has spread beyond COVID-19 and influenza vaccines.

sions about their health.”

Dr. Marc Lashley, who sees patients in southwest Nassau County, said he and his colleagues are “up in arms” over the advisory panel changes and with federal vaccine policies.

“We feel sort of despondent that we are powerless to stop this,” said Lashley, another pediatrician with Allied Physicians Group. “It’s going to affect how people view vaccines and vaccine safety and cause all kinds of confusion.”

Lashley said patients are coming to him with more questions and concerns about vaccines, including those required for entrance to school.

To attend day care, prekindergarten and elementary school, students need to show proof of vaccination for illnesses such as measles, mumps, rubella, polio, chickenpox and hepatitis B.

But many are choosing not to have their children receive several immunizations simultaneously or follow a schedule set by the government.

“More people are asking to space out their vaccines in general,” he said. “They are making their own schedules, saying they want one shot at a time. I try to explain to them the science about why this is a bad idea. But I also acknowledge their sovereignty as parents and ability to make decisions for their children.”

Many vaccine experts have argued against spacing out childhood vaccinations beyond what is recommended because it increases the period of time that children do not have protection against viral and bacterial infections.

In a statement to Newsday, state Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald said the

agency is “closely monitoring” the recent changes to the ACIP, and if changes to vaccine recommendations are made, it will assess any impact on New Yorkers.

McDonald said the state DOH remains “committed to sharing honest, science-based vaccine information and ensuring the continued safety, effectiveness, and accessibility of immunization efforts across the state.”

Calls for ‘unbiased science’

In a statement last Monday after dismissing the ACIP committee, Kennedy said the agency “was prioritizing the restoration of public trust above any specific pro- or anti-vaccine agenda. The public must know that unbiased science — evaluated through a transparent process and insulated from conflicts of interest

— guides the recommendations of our health agencies.”

In a joint statement following the ACIP dismissals, the Nassau and Suffolk Medical Societies expressed “deep concern regarding the recent decision affecting access to vaccines — a decision that undermines decades of public health progress, places vulnerable populations at increased risk, and ignores overwhelming medical evidence. Vaccines are one of the safest and most effective tools we have to prevent disease, reduce suffering, and save lives. Limiting access or casting doubt on their necessity not only endangers individual children but weakens the health and safety of our communities.”

Major medical organizations have concluded there is no link between vaccines and autism, one of the most common concerns among vaccine skeptics.

Still, John Gilmore, of Long Beach, who heads the Autism Action Network, a nonprofit focused on researching the causes and treatment for autism and who supports Kennedy’s changes, said the number of people skeptical about vaccines has gone up “immensely” since the mandates created during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“There’s a lot more concern about the safety and efficacy of these products, and there’s a lot of concern about why they have no choice in what and when they give these things to their kids,” said Gilmore, whose group also focuses on vaccine safety and insurance reform.

Gilmore said he believes there will be more transparency in approving vaccines moving forward.

“After COVID, there is a hell of a lot of damage that’s been done to the reputation of these agencies,” he said. “They’ve got a lot of work to do. And the old ways of doing business aren’t gonna do it.”

Measles cases on the rise

Dr. Sara Siddiqui, a pediatric and adolescent medicine physician at the NYU Langone Huntington Medical Group, said she’s increasingly being questioned by parents about the ingredients, efficacy and side ef-

fects of childhood vaccines.

“Most parents understand that the vaccination process is important, however they may choose to delay or defer vaccinations at certain times,” Siddiqui said of the recent trend. “Unfortunately, when enough parents refuse a type of vaccine we can start to see outbreaks.”

Siddiqui points to the recent measles outbreaks in Texas, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio and Oklahoma as examples.

In March, health officials announced a Suffolk County infant, who was too young to be vaccinated, likely contracted their case of measles during an overseas trip.

“When the vaccination rate decreases in an area, especially for measles, outbreaks can occur as more and more children are susceptible and can spread disease,” she said.

State Health Department data shows 82.6% of Suffolk children have received at least one dose of the vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella by 2 years of age, while the number is 82% in Nassau. The statewide number is 81.2%. (The MMR vaccine is given as a series of two doses — the first typically at 12 to 15 months of age, and the second usually between ages 4 and 6.)

Dr. Matthew Harris, a pediatric emergency medicine physician at Cohen Children’s Medical Center, said those figures are “lower than what we want” but added they typically increase by the time the child is due for their second dosage.

While Harris said he’s hearing from an increasing number of parents about the safety and schedule of childhood immunization — a trend the pediatrician tracks to “disinformation” about COVID-19 vaccines — he’s yet to see a major uptick in parents rejecting the vaccines.

“The lion share of parents are still fully vaccinating their children on the schedule recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” Harris said. “My experience has been that more parents are asking questions, mostly stemming from information they’re seeing on social media.”

NEWSDAY / HOWARD SCHNAPF