

Measles cases triple in Italy as parents shun vaccine

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The number of measles cases in Italy has tripled this year, largely because parents are not getting children vaccinated due to spurious health scares, the health ministry said Friday.

More than 700 cases have been registered since the start of 2017—compared with 220 in the same period last year and 844 for the whole of 2016.

Over half have been among 15-39 year-olds and the outbreak has been concentrated in some of the country's wealthiest urban centres: Rome, Turin, Milan and Florence.

The ministry said the surge showed a worrying number of younger Italians were not fully vaccinated against the disease.

"This is largely due to the growing number of parents who refuse vaccinations despite the established scientific evidence (of their effectiveness)," it said.

According to ministry data, only 85.3 percent of Italian two-year-olds had been vaccinated in 2015, well short of the 95 percent threshold recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) to contain outbreaks.

"We need to rapidly boost the level of vaccination cover, which has fallen dangerously over recent years," said [health](#) minister Beatrice

Lorenzin.

Although it usually only triggers relatively mild symptoms, measles can cause fatal complications. In Italy's last major epidemic there were 18,000 registered cases and 15 deaths.

Italy was one of the countries where discredited claims of a link between the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination and autism had a significant impact on public perceptions of the safety of the jab.

That was partly because a local court in Rimini awarded damages to the family of a young boy with autism in 2012 on the grounds that his condition had most likely been caused by the MMR vaccination. The ruling was overturned on appeal three years later.

The notion of an MMR-autism link was first suggested by a British researcher, Andrew Wakefield, in a 1998 paper for medical journal the *Lancet* that was subsequently found to have been falsified.

The paper was withdrawn in 2010 and Wakefield was barred from practising medicine. Numerous major studies since have found no evidence of a link.

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