

**Title:** Nurses Manage Vaccine Rumors in Their Own Measles-Impacted Community

**Activities:** Monitor and manage rumors; Engage in ongoing dialogue with community; Identify population's main information needs and best channels to reach

**Stakeholders:**

**Phases:** Detection; Early response; Intervention; Post-intervention and recovery

**Years:** 2019

**Countries:** United States

**Agent:** Measles

**Case study prepared by:** Madison Alvarez, February 27, 2020

**Please include full case study text below this line.**

Most people in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in New York City had received the Measles-Mumps-Rubella vaccine, but just enough had adopted an anti-vax stance as measles hit their community in 2019 to spark a devastating outbreak. The community had been infected by travelers returning from Israel, which was facing its own emerging epidemic.<sup>1</sup>

The ultra-Orthodox community was already relatively isolated and mistrustful of many public institutions. This led an anonymous anti-vax organization, Parents Educating and Advocating for Children's Health, to circulate its "Vaccine Safety Handbook," which exacerbated rumors that vaccines were not Kosher<sup>2</sup> or causing autism and other diseases.<sup>3</sup>

To alleviate these fears, a Vaccine Taskforce of Orthodox Jewish nurses assembled to address the unique concerns of patients and families in their community. They analyzed PEACH's handbook

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<sup>1</sup> Pager, T. (2019, April 9). 'Monkey, Rat and Pig DNA': How Misinformation Is Driving the Measles Outbreak Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/nyregion/jews-measles-vaccination.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

<sup>2</sup> Pager, T. (2019, April 9). 'Monkey, Rat and Pig DNA': How Misinformation Is Driving the Measles Outbreak Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/nyregion/jews-measles-vaccination.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

<sup>3</sup> Bursztynsky, J. (2019, April 21). Jewish nurses debunk anti-vaxxer misinformation as measles spreads in NYC ultra-Orthodox community. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/18/jewish-nurses-debunk-anti-vaxxer-misinformation-as-measles-spreads.html>

to understand what beliefs may be circulating before creating their own to distribute to those not seeking medical care, called Parents Informed and Educated (PIE).<sup>4</sup> It featured a rotting peach on the cover, poking fun at the claims they hope to refute.<sup>5</sup>

The Vaccine Taskforce also educated physicians on addressing vaccine hesitancy. Nurses encouraged them to truly listen to and directly respond to patient's questions and do their best to establish a relationship in the short time they had in each appointment. They hoped this training will alleviate patient's concerns and promote trust in the medical system.<sup>6</sup> "Simple education in a respectful, hand-holding manner really is going a lot further than anything else so far," according to Bilma Marcus, DNP, RN.<sup>7</sup>

A similar group organized a confidential hotline where community members can ask questions about measles and the vaccine, as well as request that volunteers subtly vaccinate them in their homes.<sup>8</sup> This was especially important given the low rates of internet use locally. The community was used to receiving health information from people they trusted and knew, and through conversations rather than looking up studies.<sup>9</sup>

While measuring the impact of these measures is difficult, given that they occurred simultaneously with policies making vaccines mandatory to attend school and free vaccination

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<sup>4</sup> Bursztynsky, J. (2019, April 21). Jewish nurses debunk anti-vaxxer misinformation as measles spreads in NYC ultra-Orthodox community. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/18/jewish-nurses-debunk-anti-vaxxer-misinformation-as-measles-spreads.html>

<sup>5</sup> Hogan, G. (2019, March 26). How Orthodox Jewish Nurses Are Fighting 'Anti-Vaccination Propaganda' Targeting Their Community. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://gothamist.com/news/how-orthodox-jewish-nurses-are-fighting-anti-vaccination-propaganda-targeting-their-community>

<sup>6</sup> Schaffer, A. (2019, January 25). Amid a Measles Outbreak, an Ultra-Orthodox Nurse Fights Vaccination Fears in Her Community. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/as-told-to/amid-a-measles-outbreak-an-ultra-orthodox-nurse-fights-vaccination-fears-in-her-community>

<sup>7</sup> McKay, B., & West, M. G. (2019, May 5). What Can Stop the Measles Outbreak? Officials Lean on an Unlikely Band of Locals. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-can-finally-stop-the-measles-outbreak-officials-lean-on-an-unlikely-band-of-locals-11557077101>

<sup>8</sup> McKay, B., & West, M. G. (2019, May 5). What Can Stop the Measles Outbreak? Officials Lean on an Unlikely Band of Locals. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-can-finally-stop-the-measles-outbreak-officials-lean-on-an-unlikely-band-of-locals-11557077101>

<sup>9</sup> Pager, T. (2019, April 9). 'Monkey, Rat and Pig DNA': How Misinformation Is Driving the Measles Outbreak Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/nyregion/jews-measles-vaccination.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

pop-up clinics,<sup>10</sup> the nurses leading them cite many examples of parents who chose to vaccinate their children because of them.<sup>11</sup> This may be why similar grassroots education efforts have increasingly been deployed to address outbreaks concentrated in other close-knit communities.<sup>12</sup>

**Please include case study summary text below this line.**

To address vaccine hesitancy during a measles outbreak in their community, Orthodox Jewish nurses created pamphlets refuting anti-vax propaganda, confidential hotlines for concerned families to ask questions, and training programs for physicians to better respond to patients' questions about vaccination.

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<sup>10</sup> Pager, T. (2019, April 9). 'Monkey, Rat and Pig DNA': How Misinformation Is Driving the Measles Outbreak Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/nyregion/jews-measles-vaccination.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

<sup>11</sup> Schaffer, A. (2019, January 25). Amid a Measles Outbreak, an Ultra-Orthodox Nurse Fights Vaccination Fears in Her Community. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/as-told-to/amid-a-measles-outbreak-an-ultra-orthodox-nurse-fights-vaccination-fears-in-her-community>

<sup>12</sup> McKay, B., & West, M. G. (2019, May 5). What Can Stop the Measles Outbreak? Officials Lean on an Unlikely Band of Locals. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-can-finally-stop-the-measles-outbreak-officials-lean-on-an-unlikely-band-of-locals-11557077101>