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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, 2GB, *with Chris Kenny*, Tuesday, 15 January 2019.

Subject: Measles, Vaccination.

CHRIS KENNY: Now, you would have heard on the news that we've had eight cases of infectious measles in New South Wales since Christmas, something of an outbreak. Now, authorities have traced this to two children whose parents chose not to vaccinate them, and they've flown into Sydney after a period in Sri Lanka, prompting a health warning that's been going out today. I'm joined on the line now by the Australian Medical Association President, Dr Tony Bartone.

Thanks for joining us, Tony.

TONY BARTONE: Good evening, Chris.

CHRIS KENNY: What more can you tell us about this outbreak and how unusual it is?

TONY BARTONE: What this outbreak points to is that there is still a need to be vigilant when it comes to ensuring that our vaccination status is up to date. What we've had in this situation is two cases, or two children with measles in its evolving state, that is before it became symptomatically clear that the children did have measles, being on the plane, children who weren't vaccinated, who didn't have- or other adults who didn't have their vaccination status up to speed, up to scratch, who were obviously at risk of contracting a very highly contagious viral illness, which we know that especially in the confines of something like an aircraft is very, very likely to create that opportunity for spread and infection especially, obviously, if you don't have your vaccination status up to stage.

CHRIS KENNY: How dangerous can measles be?

TONY BARTONE: We need to remember that measles is a viral illness and it has been present for; previous to immunisation for many decades, but it can be very, very severe. It can be fatal, unfortunately, in some percentage of cases. Now, the most likely, if we look around the world right now, one of the leading causes of death in children is measles. So, that's in the larger, wider world, where vaccination status isn't as prevalent as in the Australian population. It is extremely likely to be associated with significant complications and, indeed, mortality. If your vaccination status is up to date, you're not at risk of catching it and obviously do not run that risk.

CHRIS KENNY: Well, just to up-date the warning here, New South Wales Health have said that these two children had been in Sri Lanka and they're warning people that the children were on the flight SQ221 - S-Q-2-2-1 - from Singapore. It arrived in Sydney on 11 January, so it arrived in Sydney on Friday, SQ221. The children then caught the train from the International Airport to Meadowbank via Central. So, people who are in that vicinity can be on the lookout for the symptoms of measles that include fever, sore eyes and a cough, and of course followed three or four days later by that red blotchy rash.

Now, Dr Tony Bartone, you mentioned vaccination. This already plays into directly what the debate's all about with vaccination, doesn't it? That we need to have everybody vaccinating their children so that we eliminate any outbreaks like this.

TONY BARTONE: Well, this is especially the point. We've become complacent because largely we've become; from an endemic point of view, from an opportunity point of view, Australia has been free of measles because of our very, very effective vaccination campaign.

However, because now we live in a global society, we are prone to travel in increasing numbers and increasing amounts, the opportunity to bring back measles into the country, because of travel, is significant. Especially, of course, if you are either travelling from an area which measles is - what we call - endemic, or you are not vaccinated, and you've travelled to that area there and you've picked it up, as is the case in this situation here.

But it's a message that the only safe way to prevent measles is to be vaccinated. To not vaccinate is to leave yourself prone to catching measles, especially from someone either travelling from an area where they've picked it up or bringing it back in, or someone else in the immediate community.

CHRIS KENNY: I was just going to mention the *No Jab, No Play* policy, which has been widely welcomed. People have been telling us; experts have been saying it's been quite effective. But I understand it was criticised to some degree by the ABC's 7.30 program last month, and that some medical experts are pretty furious about the way it was characterised as excluding some children and some parents from early childhood education.

TONY BARTONE: Unfortunately. When you look at the end result, if you're of the mind that you're not going to vaccinate, and your children are excluded from such facilities, from school or kinders, what have you, unfortunately the person that suffers is the child. The child is not the one making the decision, but is the one that ultimately bears the brunt of the restriction, of the isolation that comes from the *No Jab, No Play* policy.

And that is probably the root cause behind some of that intended concern. But we need to understand that the overall public good, the overall public benefit, is significantly too important in this issue to override it. We've got to really keep the community protected from a condition that is very contagious. For every 10 people that are unvaccinated, that are exposed to the measles virus, nine will catch it. So, it's extremely contagious. It's spread by droplet infection, either sneeze or cough, or from contaminated surfaces.

And the virus can live for many, many hours on those surfaces. So, we're looking at a situation where we've got a highly contagious virus, it can cause significant conditions, especially to young children, especially to pregnant mums, especially to members of the community that are either immunocompromised, going through chemotherapy, have cancers, have an immune system that is basically not working as well as it should be.

And so, they run the risk of significant cases of pneumonia or ear infections, encephalitis - which is inflammation of the brain - and unfortunately the kind of the complications, which include death. So, we've got to weigh up.

And I can understand the concern that some of these advocates have borne in terms of the *No Jab, No Play* policy, but the benefit to the community has to be really much put front and centre in this debate.

CHRIS KENNY: Tony Bartone, thanks for your time.

TONY BARTONE: My pleasure, have a good evening.

CHRIS KENNY: That's Dr Tony Bartone, he's the AMA President. And just to repeat that warning - New South Wales Health are telling us that these two children with measles came in to Australia last Friday on SQ221 from Singapore. They then caught the train on 11 January from the International Airport to Meadowbank via Central. So, they're the locations and that's the day to look out for. If you are noticing the symptoms, then of course you have to take yourself or your loved ones to the doctor.

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