We commend the MIT Medical Department for its swift and effective action amid the measles outbreak at Boston University. In March, BU reported more than 50 cases of the disease. Health officials feared the epidemic would spread to MIT because of the Institute's proximity.

The department immunized over 1200 MIT students within one week. Only a few cases of measles eventually appeared at MIT. Beginning next year, it will require entering classes to be immunized for measles and German measles before registration. Health Services' foresight is praiseworthy.

Members of the MIT community who have not had the ten-day measles or have not been immunized against them should receive the Medical Department's vaccination. It is free of charge and can be administered in 15 minutes.

College age students are the high risk group and most do not have natural immunity. As spring vacation approaches and MIT students travel across the country, they would do well to ensure their immunity.

Editorial

Health services merit praise

Do they think we're stupid, or what?

The Reagan administration is presenting its Strategic Defense Initiative, Star Wars to the public, as a population defense. It is supposed to protect us from Soviet ICBMs and render us invincible.

I have nothing against the idea of shooting down missiles aimed at me, my friends and relations. Defensive weapons are nothing but good things. If I could stop my fingers and have a bunch of them up there, I would.

Of course, it is crucially important that the weapons work. If that were the only problem, I would gladly let the government go ahead, and I would give the researchers my blessing. Unfortunately, there is a very simple reason why Star Wars can't defend our population.

Cruise missiles.

You can't stop cruise missiles from space. They fly too close to the ground for radar to detect them. Because cruise missiles fly much more slowly and have a shorter range, they do not threaten our ICBMs, which are based well inland. So cruise missiles could not be used in a first strike against our missile bases.

Soviet cruise missiles, therefore, will be targeted at our cities. And while we may worry more about a cruise missile attack against our cities than an ICBM attack against our bases, it is more difficult to evacuate a half million people from a city than to launch a missile from a silo, even with an hour or two of extra time.

For coastal cities only a few minutes away from Soviet subs, there isn't even time to get people to fallout shelters.

The Soviet Union is able to destroy our cities. We cannot prevent it from doing so. The best we can do is make sure that the consequences for the Soviets will be so bad that they will decide they had better not.

So what can Star Wars do? Defend missiles. If we could knock down Soviet ICBMs, we would have plenty of time to decide whether to launch ours. No wonder the Soviets are worried.

The government has argued that Star Wars will protect us from terrorist attacks and from accidents. Any terrorist group that can buy or steal a nuclear bomb is going to try and smuggle it into the United States. They would not build a silo and a rocket and launch it. Even if they steal a missile, it will be a cruise missile and not an ICBM.

As for the "accident" argument: if through some crazy mishap, a missile is launched at an unmanned target, we will certainly be able to tell that it is a missile and not a full-scale attack. While an anti-missile system would save lives in that case, its real value still lies in being a deterrent to a potential first-strike against our missiles.

In any case, the Reagan administration wants a system that can shoot down thousands of missiles, not a single errant one. My initial reaction to his "Star Wars" speech, therefore, was: Who do they think they're kidding?

I'm still baffled. Do they expect us to believe that the reason Star Wars is to protect our population? The Soviets don't, and neither do I.

I am not arguing against SDI. I'm just pointing out the Emperor's indemnous exposure. The government should admit that what it is trying to do is protect our own striking capability through a preemptive Soviet first-strike.

Whether this goal is laudable or practical will be the subject of another column.