

MEASLES: Talking Points

Measles cases and outbreaks are emerging in several states, including Missouri as vaccination rates drop.

- The number of measles cases in the US has already reached the same level this year (in March) that occurred during the entire year last year (2023).
- When measles vaccination rates in a community are at 95% or more, *herd immunity* safeguards vulnerable people who can't receive vaccinations due to their age, health conditions, or compromised immune system.
- Missouri's MMR vaccination rate among kindergarteners has dropped steadily from 95.4% in the 2016-2017 school year to 90.5%* at the start of the current school year (Aug 2023).

*This is preliminary data self-reported by schools.

- Religious (non-medical) exemptions have also increased from 1.9% to 3.5%
- In our community . . . [speak to your county's MMR vaccination rates and your religious exemption rates, if you wish to]
- [Share information about what you are doing to increase vaccination rates (e.g. working with schools and providers, holding special vaccination clinics, extended hours, etc.)]

Vaccination offers the best protection against measles.

- Children should be vaccinated against measles at 12 – 15 months old and again at 4 – 6 years old.
- People who will be traveling out of the U.S. should be vaccinated before they leave.
- The measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe and effective at preventing disease.
 - One dose of the MMR vaccine provides 93% protection against measles. The second dose increases protection to 97% for a lifetime.
 - Like medicines, vaccines can have side effects, but most people who are vaccinated have no side effects.
 - Side effects that do occur are usually mild, like a fever, rash, or soreness at the vaccination site or temporary joint pain and stiffness.
 - This vaccine has been used in the United State since the 1970s.

Measles can be very dangerous, especially for children under 5 years old and people with compromised immune systems.

- Pneumonia occurs in up to 6 percent of reported cases and amounts for 60% of deaths attributed to measles.
- Encephalitis (brain infection) may also occur, which can lead to brain damage.
- Other complications include middle ear infection and convulsions.
- There is no specific treatment for measles and some people may die, even with the best care.

Measles is a very contagious disease.

- One person with measles can easily pass it on to 9 out of 10 people who are unvaccinated or do not have natural immunity.
 - It spreads through the air when a person with measles coughs or sneezes.
 - Measles virus can live in the air for up to 2 hours.
- A person with measles is contagious from 4 days before the rash appears until 4 days after the rash appears.
- The virus can also be picked up by touching contaminated surfaces.

Most people think of measles as a childhood disease, but anyone can get measles if they are not protected.

- Most cases of measles are among preschool children, adolescents, and young adults.
- People who have not been vaccinated are at risk for measles.
- Children should be vaccinated against measles at 12 – 15 months old and again at 4 – 6 years old.

Measles symptoms usually appear in two stages, starting 1 – 2 weeks after a person has been exposed to the virus.

- The first stage starts with a runny nose, cough and a rising fever and the eyes may become red and sensitive to light.
- The second stage begins about 3 – 7 days later and includes a high temperature (103-105°F) and a red blotchy rash.
 - The rash usually begins on the face and then spreads over the entire body.
 - Little white spots may also appear on the gums and inside of the cheeks.
 - The rash lasts about 4 – 7 days.
- Some people may have serious complications like pneumonia or encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Some may even die.

MMR is a recommended childhood vaccination that is covered by most private insurance companies.

- Parents should check with their insurance provider if they have questions about coverage.
- Children without health insurance may be eligible to receive an MMR vaccine under the CDC's Vaccine for Children Program.
- Ask the Health Department about your options for getting you and your child vaccinated against measles.