Pennsylvania
Department of Health

MEASLES: INFORMATION TO PREVENT SPREAD IN SCHOOL AND CHILD CARE SETTINGS*

WHAT IS MEASLES?

Measles is a very contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. Before the measles vaccine became available, measles was a common childhood disease. Some people may suffer from severe complications, such as pneumonia (infection of the lungs) and encephalitis (swelling of the brain). They may need to be hospitalized and could die. Symptoms include: rash, high fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET MEASLES?

Measles is easily spread from person to person. When an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes, the virus is released into the air and enters another person's body through the nose, mouth or throat. People can also become sick if they come in contact with the mucus or saliva (spit) from an infected person. The measles virus can live on contaminated surfaces and in the air for up to two hours after an infected person was present. A person infected with measles can transmit the virus to others from 4 days before through 4 days after rash onset.

ARE THERE COMPLICATIONS WITH A MEASLES VIRUS INFECTION?

Yes. Common complications include ear infections and diarrhea. Severe complications include pneumonia (infection of the lungs), encephalitis (swelling of the brain), and death. Measles may cause pregnant persons to give birth prematurely or have low-birth-weight babies.

IF A PERSON IS EXPOSED, DOES THAT MEAN THEY WILL GET SICK OR INFECTED?

An exposure occurs when a person is in the same space (e.g. room, office, waiting room, building) with someone who has measles, or occupies this space within 2 hours after the infected person has left. People are less likely to get sick with measles if they have been appropriately vaccinated. Approximately 90 percent of susceptible (non-immune) people will get measles when they are exposed to someone with the disease.

SHOULD SCHOOLS BE CLOSED DURING AN OUTBREAK OF MEASLES?

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) generally does not recommend school closure for outbreaks of infectious diseases. The decision to close a school is an administrative decision and one that should be made only after consultation with public health officials and the district medical personnel.

PENNSYLVANIA REGULATIONS

- Pennsylvania immunization requirements for measles are located at:
  - **§ 23.83. Immunization requirements.**
  - **School Vaccination Requirements for Attendance in Pennsylvania Schools** for PA school vaccination requirements
- Pennsylvania measles regulations are located at:
  - **§ 27.160. Special requirements for measles**
  - **§ 27.75. Exclusion of children, and staff having contact with children, during a measles outbreak.**
  - **§ 27.71. Exclusion of children, and staff having contact with children, for specified diseases and infectious conditions**
- Pennsylvania disease reporting requirements are located at:
  - **§ 27.21a. Reporting of cases by health care practitioners and health care facilities.**

*School settings pertain to youth camps, childcare centers, preschools, schools, and institutions of higher education. Throughout this document, we will refer to these generally as "schools"

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PREPARING AND RESPONDING TO MEASLES:
Checklist for K-12 Schools



WHY SHOULD K-12 SCHOOLS PREPARE FOR MEASLES?

Measles is caused by a highly contagious virus that spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. If one person has measles, up to 9 in 10 people nearby will become infected if they are not protected through vaccination or previous infection.

Measles can spread quickly in schools because students and staff spend a lot of time in close contact, and outbreaks can result in time out of school that disrupts learning. **Measles is more than just a rash** — it can cause serious health complications and even death. About 1 in 5 people who get measles will be hospitalized. The best protection is the **measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine.**

The risk for widespread measles in the U.S. remains low. However, measles cases occur in the U.S. every year when unvaccinated travelers get measles while they are in other countries and return to the U.S. Outbreaks also occur when measles spreads in under-vaccinated communities. Anyone without immunity to measles is at risk.

PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE MEASLES CASES

- **Know how to contact your health department** when measles is suspected. Ideally, have a point of contact ahead of time and meet with them before school starts to discuss plans for how to respond to a measles case.
- **Review health department guidance, local regulations, and laws on measles for schools** and ensure the school emergency operations plan is up to date.
- **Communicate with staff, families, and caregivers** about your school's policies and procedures:
  - **Requirements for students and staff to stay at home when they are sick.** Consider proactively sharing information about **signs and symptoms of measles** so families and caregivers know when to keep a child at home and when to seek medical evaluation.
  - **Procedures for students with measles symptoms**, such as the student being required to use a mask when possible, isolated away from others, and requiring immediate pick-up by a caregiver and medical evaluation before returning to school.
  - **Applicable state, local, or school MMR vaccine requirements.** The best way to prevent the spread of measles is to ensure that all students and staff are vaccinated or **immune to measles.** If needed, partner with your health department and local vaccine providers, such as pharmacies or pediatric clinics, to set up school-based vaccination clinics and help make MMR vaccination accessible.
- **Provide training to school nurses and other school-based healthcare providers to recognize measles symptoms.** Early symptoms can seem like a common cold and include fever; cough; runny nose; red, watery eyes; and/or tiny white spots in the mouth. A rash generally occurs 3-5 days after symptoms begin and usually appears on the face and behind the ears first and then spreads down the body.
- **Make sure your school has a supply of masks** to give to a person with measles symptoms.
- **Identify an isolation space** where a student with measles symptoms can wait for a caregiver to pick them up. This will help prevent other people from getting sick.

BE READY FOR MEASLES
cdc.gov/measles

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