

Measles Information from the WI Division of Public Health

January 28, 2015

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The CDC has reported an outbreak of measles in the U.S. currently involving eleven states. The Winnebago County Health Department would like to take this opportunity to provide some information about measles and how to prevent it.

Measles is the most deadly of all childhood rash/fever illnesses. It is a serious infection that causes fever, cough, a rash, sore eyes, and occasionally dangerous complications. Measles spreads very easily, so it is important to protect against infection. Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent measles.

Specifically, to have the best protection against measles, two doses of MMR vaccine are required. As part of the childhood immunization program the first dose of vaccine is required between 12 -15 months and the second dose before entering school, at 4 – 6 years.

It is important for you to check your child's immunization records to make sure he/she has received two doses of MMR vaccine. You may check your child's vaccine status at:
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/immunization/wir.htm>.

Measles can spread easily to and from unimmunized children. In addition to being at risk for getting sick if exposed to measles, children with one or zero doses of MMR will not be able to come to school for two weeks if exposed. If you believe that your child needs the MMR vaccine, please call your health care provider or local health department.

A fact sheet about measles is included with this letter. If your child does develop a rash with a fever, they should not attend school and you should call your health care provider. Please tell the clinic you suspect your child may have measles. It is important to call the clinic or hospital before taking your child in.

Please remember – the best way to protect your child is to ensure they have had two doses of MMR. You may contact the Winnebago County Health Department at 920-232-3000 with any questions or concerns.

What is measles?

Measles is a disease caused by measles virus and sometimes referred to as "hard", "red" or "10-day measles".

Who can get measles?

Measles virus can infect any person of any age who has not previously had the disease or measles vaccine.

How is measles spread?

Airborne droplets, from coughing or sneezing, spread the virus. It spreads easily and rapidly.

How soon do symptoms appear after exposure?

It takes from 8-12 days for the cold-like symptoms to appear and 14 days for the rash.

What are the signs and symptoms of measles?

The disease begins with cold-like signs and symptoms including a cough, runny nose, high temperature and red watery eyes. By the second day after onset, a red blotchy rash appears at the hairline and spreads down the body to the arms and legs. The rash disappears in the same order of appearance (head to foot) in about 5-6 days.

How can parents be sure that their child's illness is measles?

The only sure way to determine if an illness is indeed measles is through a blood test.

When and for how long is a person able to spread measles?

Measles can be spread from one day before the onset of cold-like symptoms, through the fourth day of the rash.

What are the complications associated with measles?

Among children with measles, about 10% develop ear infections, about 5% develop pneumonia, about 0.1% (1 per 1000 cases) develop encephalitis (inflammation of the brain that can result in deafness or mental retardation), and about 0.1% to 0.2% (1 to 2 per 1000 cases) die from it.

Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles.

Can measles be prevented?

Yes. Measles vaccine (usually given in combination with rubella and mumps vaccine, called measles-mumps-rubella or MMR vaccine) is recommended for all children at 12-15 months of age and again at 4-6 years of age. The 2-doses of vaccine normally provide life long immunity.

Does a past infection with measles make a person immune for life?

Yes