

Measles

Information and Recommendations to Help Stop the Spread in Your Community

Dear friends and neighbors,

Measles is circulating in our community right now. We are writing this newsletter because we care about our community, especially the young children and pregnant women that may become severely ill with measles if we do not act soon. This newsletter provides you and your family with accurate information regarding measles infection, vaccination and how to care for someone who becomes sick. It also describes how and when to access measles testing, medical care and vaccination if you choose to. Whether your family chooses vaccination or not, measles deserves our attention.

Measles is a very contagious disease that can be prevented with a vaccine. It causes flu-like symptoms, including a high fever that can rise above 104°F, cough, runny nose, red watery eyes and a rash. The rash usually starts on the head and face and then spreads down the body to the neck, chest, arms, legs and feet. The rash usually has both flat and raised bumps on the skin that may become joined together as they spread from the head to the body.

Measles can cause serious complications, including diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, brain swelling, and death. About 1 out of every 5 children with measles may need to go to the hospital. People at higher risk for serious illness include children younger than 5, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. Measles can be especially serious during pregnancy and may cause pregnancy loss, preterm labor and low birth weight. It is very important to protect pregnant women from being exposed to measles.

Measles virus spreads through the air when an infected person breathes, sneezes or coughs. A person can spread measles before the rash appears which means someone may expose family and neighbors before anyone realizes that the illness is measles. The virus can also linger in the air of a room for up to two hours after an infected person has left, making it possible for measles to spread just by being in a room where a person with measles has been.

Measles symptoms usually start 7 to 14 days after exposure to the virus. The rash usually appears 2 to 4 days after fever begins and lasts 5 to 6 days. In some cases, the rash may not appear until 21 days after exposure to a person sick with measles. There is no medication or natural remedy that can cure the illness or shorten the time a person is contagious. Vitamin A that is present in cod liver oil does not prevent or cure measles. Too much Vitamin A can be harmful to both children and adults.

Families may have home remedies that they have traditionally used for comfort. Those practices can be part of caring for your family, but please remember that making someone comfortable is not the same as treating a serious complication. Watch the sick person carefully. Please seek medical help if someone is having difficulty breathing, is difficult to wake, seems confused, cannot keep fluids down, is not urinating normally, appears badly dehydrated, has a seizure, or seems to be getting much sicker rather than gradually improving. You can call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

If you think someone has measles, please call before going into a doctor's office, clinic, hospital, or the Health Department. Tell them that the person may have measles. This allows them to make arrangements so that other people—especially babies, pregnant women, and people who are already sick—are not exposed to the virus.

The public health experts strongly recommend the following:

- If someone is not vaccinated and has been exposed to measles, they should stay home for 21 days after their last exposure. If you do not develop symptoms by the 21st day, you are not infected. Vaccinated people do not need to stay home after an exposure.
- Measles is highly contagious starting from 4 days before the rash starts through 4 days after the rash started (a total of 9 days). If you suspect that you or your child has measles, you should stay home for at least 5 days after the rash was first noticed. Any friends or family members you were in contact with during the 4 days before or 4 days after the start of the rash should be notified of their possible exposure to the virus.

Unvaccinated people may be able to prevent getting sick with measles if they receive the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine within 72 hours (3 days) of exposure to a sick person. If you were exposed more than 3 days before vaccination you may still get sick with measles, but this is not from the vaccine.

- There is also a treatment called immune globulin that is recommended for certain people who are at greater risk of serious illness after being exposed. Immune globulin is not a vaccine. It contains antibodies and may be given within a limited time after exposure. This can be particularly important for young babies, pregnant women who are not immune, and people whose immune systems are severely weakened.
- Stay home while sick. Any close contacts to the sick person that have not been previously vaccinated with MMR should also stay home. Staying home will help prevent the spread of the virus and protect individuals who are not yet vaccinated. This means not attending school, visiting family, going to work, going to church, going to the store, or traveling outside of your community. This helps to protect the most vulnerable members

of your community. If symptoms occur, you can contact your doctor or health department for testing. Please always notify your doctor ahead of time so they can be prepared and prevent exposure to others.

- A healthcare provider may test for measles using a swab placed in the nose or throat of the sick person or child
 - These swabs are similar to Q-tips and do not contain medicine or virus on them. It takes 1-2 days to get the result from this test
 - If the doctor believes it might be measles, they will ask you to stay home for at least 5 days after the rash was first seen. This will help lower the chance of spreading the disease to others. Notify all close contacts that they may have been exposed.
- The best way to protect you and your loved ones is to stay up to date with MMR vaccines.
 - A total of two doses of MMR is recommended. The first dose is given to infants starting at 12 months old and the second to children at 4-6 years old. Even just one dose provides a high level of immunity to measles. If you did not have MMR vaccination as a child you can still receive it as an adult.
 - Due to the current measles outbreak in your community, we recommend that infants 6 – 11 months old receive the MMR vaccine. This can be discussed with your baby's doctor.
 - The MMR vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. Women that receive the MMR vaccine should avoid pregnancy for 28 days after receiving the vaccine. However, it is safe for a breastfeeding woman to receive the MMR vaccine.

- The MMR vaccine is very safe with minimal side effects. MMR vaccine is made with small pieces of weakened measles virus. The vaccine virus is too weak to make you or others sick with measles. It signals your body to develop protection against future exposure to measles. A very small number of children may develop rash and fever 7-10 days after the vaccine. This is a sign of the immune system working properly and does not mean they are infected with measles.
- If you receive the MMR vaccine and happen to already be infected with measles, this does not make the illness worse.

Common Questions and Answers:

1. What is the best way to prevent getting measles?

The best way to prevent measles is through MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccination. MMR vaccination is highly effective against measles. Women that are vaccinated prior to pregnancy pass protection to their babies for the first several months of life. If you have decided not to vaccinate with MMR, the next best prevention is to avoid exposure to measles. This can be done by avoiding close contact with people who are experiencing symptoms of illness.

2. My children are very healthy and rarely ever get sick. If they get measles, it would probably be mild. Why do I need to vaccinate them?

We cannot always predict who will get the sickest from a disease. Many healthy children and adults have become very sick with measles. We have a responsibility to care for our children, ourselves, and our neighbors. One person with a mild case of measles has the potential to spread the virus to other friends, family, and neighbors

around them. Many people have health conditions that make them more likely to become very sick from measles.

3. My family and I already had German measles or 3-day measles. Do we still need to get vaccinated for measles now?

German measles or 3-day measles is a different infection called rubella. A rubella infection is much less severe than a measles infection and is caused by a different virus. You and your family still need the MMR vaccine to protect against a measles infection.

4. I'm concerned that I will be supporting abortions if I give my children the MMR vaccine.

MMR vaccine is made using fetal cells that originally developed from one elective abortion that occurred in the 1960s. All new cells are grown from the original cells, and no additional abortions have been needed. Refusing to receive MMR vaccination will not change the outcome of the original abortion that occurred over 50 years ago. The fetal cells are used to help grow the weakened virus, but no fetal cells remain in the final vaccine product. This is like fruit attached to a stem. Some fruit must be attached to the stem to grow, but when you are ready to make a pie, the stem gets removed for the final product.

5. Does MMR vaccine cause autism?

No - vaccines do not cause autism. The relationship of vaccines and autism has been studied for many years through observations of thousands of children. The studies have looked at groups of children that were vaccinated and groups of children that were not vaccinated. Each study found that the number of kids diagnosed with autism was the same for the vaccinated and unvaccinated children. Symptoms of autism are present from birth, but they are often subtle and not realized until later.

6. How long must the person with measles stay home and away from others?

A person infected with measles should stay home and away from others for at least 5 days after the rash was first noticed.

7. Why do all family members who live in my home need to stay home when one person is sick with measles?

Unvaccinated family members that have been close to a person who is sick with measles are likely to become sick within 1 – 3 weeks after their last exposure to the person. Since measles is contagious before you know you are sick, staying home will prevent the spread.

Vaccinated family members do not need to stay home.

8. I'm unvaccinated, and I was exposed to a family member with measles, what should I do?

If it has been less than 72 hours (3 days) since you were exposed, you should consider receiving MMR vaccine for protection. If MMR vaccine is received within 72 hours of your first exposure, you do not need to stay home. If you are unvaccinated, you should stay home starting 7 days from your first exposure and until 21 days after your last exposure. If you are living with a person who has measles, you should stay home for at least 14 days after the last day they were contagious. These timelines can be confusing, but your doctor and the health department will be able to assist you in determining the exact dates

9. Can I still host church if a person with measles is in my house?

This is not a good idea. Since the measles virus is passed through the air and can linger in the air for up to 2 hours, there is a high chance of exposure. We understand that community gatherings are very important and encourage outdoor gatherings or maintaining

airflow with open windows to reduce the risk of virus spreading while there is measles in your community.

10. Should I give cod liver oil or Vitamin A to someone sick with measles?

Vitamin A that is present in cod liver oil does not prevent measles and it does not cure measles. Doctors may use vitamin A as part of measles care, especially for children. Too much vitamin A can be harmful to both children and adults and therefore should only be given while being monitored in a hospital. We strongly recommend not giving cod liver or other sources of vitamin A to sick individuals.

If you have any questions about measles or would like to have a provider come to your home to provide vaccinations, please call your local health department at 406-535-7433.

Sincerely,
Fergus County Health Department