

# Talking Points for Partners: Measles Outbreak

April 25, 2017

## What is the issue?

The Minnesota Department of Health and Hennepin County Public Health are investigating an outbreak of measles in Hennepin County children. For current information on the number of cases, go to the MDH [Measles website \(www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/measles/\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/measles/).

## Who is affected?

All confirmed cases are currently Somali Minnesotan children living in Hennepin County. All of the cases were unvaccinated as of April 25, 2017. For current information on who is affected, go to the MDH [Measles website \(www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/measles/\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/measles/).

## Is this problem specific to the Somali community?

This outbreak is about unvaccinated children, not specific communities or ethnic groups. Measles is a concern anywhere you have significant numbers of unvaccinated children, such as ECFE groups, schools, etc. Unfortunately, Minnesota's Somali communities have been targeted with misinformation about vaccine risks and have subsequently struggled with low rates of MMR immunization.

## What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. It can lead to hospitalization and in rare cases death. Measles spreads through the air by coughing or sneezing. You can get measles by just being in the same room as someone who has measles.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include a high fever, cough, runny nose and watery eyes, followed by a rash that typically spreads from head to the rest of the body. A person with measles can pass it to others from four days before their rash appears to four days after it appears.

## Who is at risk?

Most people in Minnesota can't get sick from measles because they have been vaccinated or have had measles before. However, in recent years MMR vaccination rates have declined in some communities and groups – often due to fears related to misinformation about vaccine risks. This decline in vaccination rates increases the risk – not only for those who choose not to be vaccinated, but also for those who cannot be vaccinated because of their health status (for example, a weakened immune system) or because they are too young.

### **How can I protect myself?**

Measles can spread very easily among unvaccinated people, so the best way to protect yourself and your community is to make sure everyone who is able receives the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

### **How can I check that my children and I have been vaccinated?**

Contact your health care provider to confirm that you and your children have received the MMR vaccine. You can also request vaccination records by calling 651-201-3980 or visiting [MIIC Immunization Records Requests \(www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/registry/immrecords.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/registry/immrecords.html).

### **How common is measles in Minnesota and the U.S.?**

Minnesota typically sees a handful of measles cases every year. Cases that show up are typically linked to international travel.

### **What should I do if I think someone I know has measles?**

People at highest risk of getting measles are those who have not been vaccinated. If a family member or loved one has symptoms of measles, call your doctor or clinic. Keep the ill person at home and avoid having visitors until you have talked with your doctor or clinic. The doctor or clinic will tell you if you should come in for a visit.

### **What should I do if my family member or I have been exposed to measles?**

State and county health departments are working to identify all places where people could have been exposed to measles. They are contacting parents of children who were exposed and are at risk of getting measles to provide them with instructions and steps to take to lower their chances of getting sick. People at highest risk for getting measles and with a higher risk for complications may be able to get immune globulin, which is a type of medicine given as a shot that has antibodies that can fight the measles virus.

### **How did this outbreak start?**

Minnesota Department of Health disease investigators are still looking into the origin of this outbreak. Measles outbreaks typically start with a person becoming infected during international travel. When they return they can spread it to others who are not vaccinated or who have not had measles in the past.

### **What are you doing to help the community?**

Stopping an outbreak means preventing sick people from passing their infection to others who are at risk. We're contacting people who may have been exposed to measles to get them treatment and keep them from passing the virus along to others.

## Talking Points for Partners: Measles Outbreak

We're also working to make sure as many people as possible are vaccinated. This includes informing people about the measles risk and partnering with Somali community leaders and health care providers to counteract vaccine misinformation.

### **What is your advice to parents who are concerned about measles?**

All Minnesota children 12 months and older who have not received a measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine should get it now. Babies younger than 12 months may have some protection from their mothers if their mothers have been vaccinated or have had measles.

MMR vaccine is given to children in two doses. The first dose offers good protection, and the second dose provides extra security.

Due to the higher risk of measles infection for Somali Minnesotan children in the current measles outbreak, MDH recommends that all Somali Minnesotan children statewide who have already received their first dose of MMR vaccine get their second dose now. This special vaccine schedule is commonly recommended during outbreaks. Parents of Somali Minnesotan children should contact their child's health care provider and specifically tell them the child needs the MMR vaccine. This may help avoid a longer wait associated with scheduling a routine appointment.

Children in Hennepin County can also get an early second dose of the MMR vaccine.

Vaccine recommendations may expand if the measles outbreak spreads to more communities.

### **What about parents who are concerned about vaccine costs?**

For parents concerned about the cost of immunizations, the Minnesota Vaccines for Children Program provides free or low-cost vaccines for eligible children through age 18. More information is available at [Can My Child Get Free or Low Cost Shots? \(www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/howpay.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/howpay.html).

### **Where can I go for more information?**

For more information on measles and for updates as the investigation continues, please visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us).