



HEALTH ALERT

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ODP Calls for Strengthening Prevention Efforts Amid Measles Outbreak

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) is updating this Health Alert due to continued spread of measles in PA. ODP is calling for Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) providers and supports coordination organizations (SCOs) to strengthen measles prevention efforts, contribute to vaccination awareness, and ensure that infection prevention and response procedures are up to date as the number of cases rise.

As of September 16th, Pennsylvania has confirmed more than 730 cases of measles, and several counties are experiencing concentrated outbreaks. The PA Department of Health (DOH) has a [measles dashboard](#) that shows case counts by county and other important measles information.

Vaccines

Vaccines are the best protection against getting sick from measles, specifically two doses of the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Two doses provide approximately 97% protection, while one provides 93% protection. Most people who are fully vaccinated will be protected for life. People who are not immune by either vaccination or documented prior infection have a 90% chance of developing measles after being exposed.

Providers and supports coordinators should review the immunization status for individuals served and talk to staff members about their immunization status. The presence of immunity is associated with the following circumstances:

- Documentation of one or more doses of the MMR vaccine
- Laboratory evidence of immunity (blood test) or laboratory confirmation of measles disease

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- Birth before 1957; adults born before that year are more likely to have had measles as children and are generally, but not always, considered immune.

Providers and SCOs should remind families and staff about the vaccination, including where it can be accessed, such as primary care providers, urgent care, pharmacies, [federally funded health centers](#), [state health centers](#), and [local health departments](#).

Prevention and Response

Providers should promote infection control practices, such as respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, frequent handwashing, and disinfection of high-touch surfaces. Staff and individuals should be encouraged to stay home when they are ill. Families of unvaccinated individuals and staff who are exposed to measles should be notified that they may need to stay home for up to three weeks after their last exposure.

Healthcare providers Should:

- Have an increased suspicion for measles in patients who are present with a febrile-rash illness and follow the proper recommendations for testing and infection control measures.
- Immediately report suspected cases of measles to local public health authorities or to the PA DOH at 877-PA-HEALTH (877-724-3258).

What is Measles:

Measles is an extremely contagious virus that lives in the mucus membranes of the nose and throat of infected people, according to health experts. The virus can be transmitted from person to person through coughing and sneezing. When an infected person sneezes or coughs, droplets spray into the air and those droplets can contain an active and contagious virus which will remain in the air and on surfaces for up to two hours. A healthy person can also be infected with the measles if they breathe the contaminated air or touch an infected surface and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.

Symptoms of a Measles infection:

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Measles normally begins with a fever (100.4° or higher) that lasts for several days. That's followed by a cough, runny nose, and watery eyes. Two to three days after the symptoms begin, tiny white spots may appear in the mouth. Three to five days after symptoms begin, a flat red spotted rash appears on the face at the hairline and spreads downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. The flat red spots may also be joined by small, raised bumps. Symptoms appear about seven to 14 days on average after exposure, but the appearance of symptoms may take as long as 21 days.

Measles symptoms typically include:

- high fever,
- cough,
- runny nose (coryza),
- red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- rash breaks out 3-5 days after symptoms begin.



Are Measles serious?

Measles can be serious at all ages, but children less than 5 and adults over 20 are more likely to have complications. Complications include:

- Ear infection that can result in permanent hearing loss.
- Diarrhea requiring hospitalization.
- Pneumonia – this is the most common cause of death in children.
- Swelling of the brain- that may lead to brain damage.
- Pregnant women may have their babies early and the baby's weight may be low.
- Of every 1,000 people who get measles 1-2 of them will die.

How do measles spread to other people?

- Infected people can spread measles to others from 4 days before through 4 days after the rash appears.
- It can spread to others through coughing and sneezing.

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- When someone sneezes or coughs the virus can live for up to 2 hours in the air.
- If other people breathe the contaminated air or touch the infected surface, then touch their eyes, noses, or mouths, they can become infected.
- More than 90% of the people close to an infected person who have not been vaccinated against measles will also become infected.

Can measles be prevented?

- Receiving the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccination can prevent measles. See your health care provider for more information related to the measles vaccination.
- The American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend children receive all vaccines according to the recommended schedule.

Resources

1. [About Measles - CDC](#)
2. [Measles Infographic - CDC](#)
3. [Measles information for healthcare providers - CDC](#)
4. [Measles | Red Book: 2024–2027 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases | Red Book Online | American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
5. [Measles Vaccine Recommendations- CDC](#)
6. [Infection control guidelines for measles- CDC](#)
7. [Measles Clinical Diagnosis Fact Sheet- CDC](#)
8. [Surveillance manual chapter on measles- CDC](#)
9. [Measles Dashboard- PA DOH](#)

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