

Message from Sara H. Cody, M.D., Santa Clara County Health Officer Measles Update 2/9/15



As you may know measles continues to circulate in the Bay Area. This is concerning not only to parents of young children, but to us all. Our mission at the Santa Clara County Public Health Department is to promote and protect the health of the community; to do so, we need your help.

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease. It spreads when a person infected with measles shares common airspace with a person who is not immune, and that person inhales the microscopic virus-containing droplets present in the air. These microscopic droplets stay in the air for about an hour. Measles symptoms start with a fever, runny nose, cough, and red eyes, followed by a rash that starts on the face and spreads down the body.

Most people who have measles recover without complications. Babies, older adults, and people who have impaired immune systems are at greater risk for complications. Complications can include ear infections, pneumonia, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis), and even death.

As parents, it's our responsibility to vaccinate our children. We do this not only to protect them from illnesses, but to also protect other children and vulnerable adults in our schools and community. This is especially important for those children who cannot get vaccinated because they are either too young or have medical reasons like having to undergo chemotherapy.

I urge parents who have previously declined or delayed getting the measles vaccine (MMR for measles, mumps, and rubella) to reconsider. The vaccine is safe and very effective in preventing the spread of measles. The single study of just 12 children from 1998 that linked autism to the MMR vaccine was later discredited because an investigation found that the researchers had fabricated the evidence; that study has been described as an "elaborate fraud," and it was subsequently retracted by the medical journal that originally published it. Many subsequent studies involving hundreds of thousands of children have not found a link between any vaccine and the development of autism.

Children should receive the first MMR at 12 to 15 months and the second MMR between 4 and 6 years of age; the second dose may be given earlier if desired, and it will still count for public school entry. Older children and adults who were not vaccinated can and should be vaccinated. Adults born after 1957 may request a second dose of the MMR vaccine if they had only one dose or are unsure of their vaccination status; or they can get a blood test to check for immunity to measles. After one dose of MMR, 95% of people become immune to measles, and 99% are immune after two doses. Adults born before 1957 likely had measles as children and are thus considered immune.

Since the measles outbreak began in December 2014 at Disneyland, 103 cases have been reported in California (as of February 6, 2015). Two of these cases are in Santa Clara County adults. Our Public Health staff have worked hard to reach everyone who may have been in contact with our local cases so that they know what to watch for and when to contact their medical provider. We have also been working with local doctors to look for more possible cases of measles and rapidly test them in our public health laboratory.

We will continue to provide updates to the public as the outbreak continues to unfold. For now, if we all do our part and vaccinate, we can have peace of mind that our children and our community have greater protection from this disease. Thank you.

For more information about measles, please visit the Santa Clara County Public Health Department website: www.sccphd.org.