

April 16, 2014

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT MEASLES TO ALBERTA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, STAFF AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Since the beginning of 2014, there has been a significantly higher than usual number of cases of measles in Canada. Cases have been reported in five Canadian provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. To date, 14 confirmed cases of measles have been identified in Alberta in 2014, and more recently hundreds of susceptible persons were exposed to a few cases of measles in the school setting.

Measles - an extremely contagious and potentially severe illness - is of greatest risk to children and young adults who have not received two doses of a measles-containing vaccine. In addition to fever, ear infections, rash and pneumonia, some rare complications can also occur, such as encephalitis (brain swelling), seizures, and death. The best way to protect children and adults from measles is to make sure that one's measles immunization is up to date. In Alberta, measles-containing vaccine is offered free of charge through Alberta's publicly funded immunization program at local public health clinics. Children should receive their first dose of measles-containing vaccine at 12 months of age, and their second dose between the ages of four and six years.

Measles can spread rapidly within a school. Should measles be identified in a school population, Alberta Health Services (AHS) public health staff immediately initiates efforts to identify at-risk students and staff. AHS public health will review the immunization records for exposed students and staff and look for documentation of immunity, including having received two doses of a measles-containing vaccine at the appropriate ages and intervals. Persons who do not have documentation of immunity should get immunized. This is the best way to prevent being infected by measles and to reduce the risk of spread of measles if an exposure in the school does occur.

Also in order to reduce the risk of measles in schools and protect those at highest risk of disease and complications, susceptible individuals in contact with an infectious case will be excluded from a school. This includes students, teachers, and volunteers.

A **susceptible individual** is defined as being born in 1970 or later and meeting the following criteria:

- lack of documented evidence of immunization with two doses of a measles-containing vaccine given at appropriate intervals, on or after the first birthday; AND
- lack of serological proof of immunity; AND
- lack of laboratory evidence of prior measles infection.

Of note, individuals born before 1970 are generally considered immune due to measles disease that was circulating broadly at that time

We highly advise that susceptible students and staff who were not born before 1970 contact their local public health office or Health Link Alberta (1-866-408-5465) to discuss immunization opportunities.

Susceptible individuals **will be excluded** from school and all other school activities outside the home. The period of exclusion will extend from five days after the first exposure through to 21 days after the last exposure.

These excluded individuals may also be at risk for developing measles and are advised to monitor themselves for symptoms. If symptoms of measles do develop, these individuals are advised to avoid contact with other people, stay home and call Health Link Alberta (1-866-408-5465) or their family physician for further instructions, as being out in public or in public buildings put other people at risk of being infected. It is very important to call ahead to your healthcare provider or facility before visiting so that precautions can be put in place to prevent possible spread of the disease to others.

If a susceptible person develops the symptoms below, this person should stay home from school.

- Fever of 38.3°C or higher; and
- Cough or runny nose or red eyes; and
- Red blotchy rash

Albertans uncertain of their immunization history, or their child's immunization history, can call their local public health office or Health Link Alberta (1-866-408-5465) to discuss. For students and staff who were immunized outside of Alberta, it is highly recommended that they obtain a copy of their immunization record and have it readily available – and translated into English, if in a different language. Doing so before an exposure occurs will reduce the impact of this exposure, expedite the process and ensure a swift response.

Please visit Alberta Health Services for more information on measles (link below), such as answers to common questions regarding measles and measles Active Health Advisories. www.albertahealthservices.ca/9842.asp

Thank you for your attention to this very significant health issue and please share this information with your administrators, school staff and parents/guardians.

Yours sincerely,



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