

## **“Information about Measles”**

### **Provided by the NJASCS Nursing Department**

The recent outbreak of the measles has brought many concerns to light. There have been many cases diagnosed only since December 2014; to date, according to the public health officials, there are about 141 diagnosed cases. The closest area to us with a possibly new diagnosed case could be a case of measles in a one-year-old in Jersey City who had not yet been vaccinated.

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory infection that's caused by a virus and it is normally passed through direct contact and through the air. The virus infects the mucous membranes and then spreads throughout the body. It causes a total-body skin rash and flu-like symptoms, including a fever, cough, and runny nose. Since measles is caused by a virus, there is no specific medical treatment for it and the virus has to run its course. But a child who is sick should drink plenty of fluids, get lots of rest, and be kept from spreading the infection to others.

### **Signs and symptoms**

While measles is probably best known for its full-body rash, one of the first signs of measles is usually a high fever, which begins about 10 to 12 days after exposure to the virus, and lasts 4 to 7 days. A runny nose, a cough, red and watery eyes, and small white spots inside the cheeks can develop in the initial stage. After several days, a rash erupts, usually on the face and upper neck. Over about 3 days, the rash spreads, eventually reaching the hands and feet. The rash lasts for 5 to 6 days, and then fades. On average, the rash occurs 14 days after exposure to the virus (within a range of 7 to 18 days). People who recover from measles are immune for the rest of their lives.

### **Who is at risk?**

Unvaccinated young children are at highest risk of measles and its complications, including death. Unvaccinated pregnant women are also at risk. Any non-immune person (who has not been vaccinated or was vaccinated but did not develop immunity) can become infected. Unvaccinated people who are exposed to measles and show symptoms of the virus should seek medical care. Otherwise, they should stay home and not return to childcare, school, or work until 21 days after they were exposed.

### **Contagiousness**

Measles is highly contagious. Measles spreads when people breathe in or have direct contact with virus-infected fluid, such as the droplets sprayed into the air when someone with measles sneezes or coughs. A person who is exposed to the virus might not show symptoms until 8-10 days later.

The virus remains active and contagious in the air or on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours. People with measles are contagious from 4 days prior to the onset of the rash to 4 days after the rash erupts, and are most contagious while they have a fever, runny nose, and cough.

### **Treatment**

There is no specific medical treatment for measles.

Kids with measles should have their condition closely monitored by a doctor. In some cases, measles can lead to other complications, such as otitis media (ear infections), croup, diarrhea, pneumonia, and encephalitis (inflammatory condition of the brain), which may require antibiotics or hospitalization.

Children with measles should be quarantined for 4 days after their rash appears. If they have a weakened immune system, they should stay in isolation until they make a full recovery and all symptoms are gone.

## Prevention

The most important thing you can do to protect your kids from measles is to have them vaccinated according to the immunization schedule prescribed by your doctor.

Older kids are usually immunized against measles according to state and school health regulations. For most, measles protection is part of the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine (MMR) or measles-mumps-rubella-varicella vaccine (MMRV) given when they're 12 to 15 months old and again when they're 4 to 6 years old. Infants are generally protected from measles for 6 months after birth due to immunity passed on by their mothers. Measles vaccine usually is not given to infants younger than 12 months old. But if there's a measles outbreak, or a child will be traveling outside the United States, the vaccine may be given when a child is 6-11 months old, followed by the usual MMR immunization at 12-15 months and 4-6 years of age.

As with all immunization schedules, there are important exceptions and special circumstances. Your doctor will have the most current information about vaccine recommendations

## When to Call the Doctor

Call the doctor immediately if you suspect that your child has measles. Also, it's important to get medical care after measles exposure, especially if your child:

- is an infant
- is taking medicines that suppress the immune system
- has tuberculosis, cancer, or a disease that affects the immune system

Most important remember that measles, a once common disease, is preventable through routine childhood immunizations.