



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama Department of Public Health urges immunization for measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In light of 11 cases of measles associated with an Arizona Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center, the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) has located four people who came to Alabama after possible exposure to measles. As of Tuesday morning, the ADPH has determined that these four people do not have signs of measles, but they will be vaccinated and monitored for 42 days for any illness. The health department is in the process of locating a fifth person with possible measles exposure and expects to talk to that person today.

It is important for everyone to understand that communities with groups of unvaccinated people are vulnerable to measles outbreaks. At least 95 percent of people in a community need to be immunized for measles to achieve herd immunity. Herd immunity protects the people who received the vaccine as well as children too young to be vaccinated, persons with medical conditions preventing vaccination, and the less than 3 percent of people who do not respond to the vaccine.

Parents need to vaccinate their children according to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices immunization schedule, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. State law requires children to be up to date on their vaccinations prior to attending child care centers and school, which includes MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine.

"People who don't get measles vaccine put others at risk," Dr. Karen Landers, pediatrician and medical consultant for the Alabama Department of Public Health Immunization Division, said. "The summer is a good time to have your children immunized." Dr. Landers wants parents who fear side effects of vaccinations to know measles is highly contagious and a serious disease with life-threatening complications, and that concerns about links between vaccines and autism are baseless. Landers stated, "I can say as a scientist and as a pediatrician that the measles vaccine does not cause autism."

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. Measles can stay airborne or live on surfaces for up to two hours. Symptoms include fever, runny nose, cough and a rash all over the body. Those infected can transmit the virus for about five days before the typical rash appears. Symptoms occur within one to two weeks after exposure. Measles is so contagious that any child who is exposed to it and not vaccinated will probably get the disease.

Common complications of measles are ear infections and less often pneumonia. Rarer complications are inflammation of the brain and death. Routine MMR vaccination is recommended for all children, with the first dose given at age 12-15 months, and a second dose at age 4-6 years. Unless they have other evidence of immunity, adults born after 1956 should get at least one dose of MMR vaccine. Two appropriately spaced doses of MMR vaccine are recommended for health care personnel, college students and international travelers.

Any persons who suspect they have measles should be promptly screened before entering medical waiting rooms and appropriately isolated, or have their office appointments scheduled at the end of the day to prevent exposure of other patients.

For more information, contact your local health department or visit adph.org/immunization/.