



Buncombe County Health and Human Services

Public Health ~ Adult & Children's Protective Services ~ Economic Services & Work Strategies
Parks, Greenways & Recreation ~ Human Resources, Services Support & Finance

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Health Alert

Measles Outbreak in North Carolina Urges Vaccination to Prevent Spread

Public health officials from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services are working with local health departments to investigate and control an outbreak of measles. To date, 8 cases have been confirmed in North Carolina, 7 in Stokes County and 1 in Orange County. There are known exposures in many other counties including several in western North Carolina. Local public health departments in these counties are contacting those who might have been exposed to these cases and providing vaccine to limit the spread of infection.

Buncombe County Department of Health is alerting the public and health providers about the outbreak in North Carolina in order to prompt action needed to prevent an outbreak in Buncombe. Health Director Gibbie Harris states, "If your children are not vaccinated against measles we strongly recommend getting them the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine. It will protect them from the potential consequences of this infection and will help protect those in our community who cannot take the vaccine. Pregnant women, infants in their first year of life and people who are immunocompromised are not able to take the vaccine."

Harris reports concern about the outbreak because Buncombe has the highest percentage of school-age children in North Carolina who are not immunized due to religious exemption from vaccines. Harris states that measles is normally very uncommon in North Carolina; therefore, many people aren't aware of the symptoms or risks of severe illness or death. Measles spreads quickly, particularly in children and adults who aren't vaccinated. Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, 90% of the people

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close to that person who are not immune will also become infected. The virus can live on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours. Measles is spread through the air by coughing and sneezing. It also can be transmitted through contact with secretions from the nose or mouth of an infected person. Initial symptoms may include fever, runny nose, watery red eyes and cough. After a few days, a rash appears on the head and spreads over the entire body. Measles can lead to pneumonia and other complications, especially in young children. The disease poses serious risks for pregnant women, including miscarriage and premature birth.

Recommendations to the public:

- **Measles can be prevented by the combination MMR** (measles, mumps and rubella) **vaccine**. It is important for all individuals 12 months of age and older to be vaccinated.
- Vaccine is readily available. Anyone interested in getting vaccinated should contact their health care provider or their local health department.
- The early symptoms of measles can be similar to those of many other infections, it is recommended that anyone with **fever, runny nose, watery red eyes and a cough**, should stay at home and limit contact with others to avoid spreading illness.
- If you develop a rash or if your symptoms worsen, call your doctor or seek medical care. If you do seek medical care, call your doctor's office or health care facility before you go so they can prepare for your visit and protect other patients from exposure to the disease.
- Pregnant women, infants in their first year of life and people who are immunocompromised should call their doctor if they suspect they have been exposed to measles.

For more information

- Disease Control Division at Buncombe County Department of Health by calling (828) 250.5109
- Buncombe County: www.buncombecounty.org
- North Carolina: <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/diseases/rubeola.html>

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