



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

NEWS RELEASE

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Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

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Colorado travelers warned of measles risk

State health officials warn that measles outbreaks overseas, especially in Europe, may expose Coloradans traveling abroad. Officials are encouraging people traveling abroad to make sure they are up to date on their measles vaccinations.

Infants and children who have not received their measles booster are especially at risk for the disease.

In March, a woman traveling from London to New Mexico made a flight transfer at Denver International Airport. She later was diagnosed with measles, creating the potential that she may have exposed other travelers to measles. Fortunately, no cases of measles connected to the woman were reported. However, state health officials warn it likely is only a matter of time before there is a measles outbreak in Colorado related to international travel.

“We’ve seen recent measles outbreaks in Utah, Florida and Minnesota,” said Joni Reynolds, director of the Colorado Immunization Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. “The majority of these cases are linked to unvaccinated or under-vaccinated Americans traveling abroad. With the summer travel season upon us, the risk of measles making it to Colorado is heightened.”

Before any international travel, infants 6 months through 11 months of age should have at least one dose of measles-containing vaccine, which is earlier than the usual recommended age for initial measles vaccination. Children 12 months and older who are traveling internationally should receive two doses of measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine, separated by at least 28 days. Adults also should review their vaccination records to ensure they are up to date.

Parents traveling with children to Europe should contact their health care provider for vaccination recommendations. In addition, parents can contact their local public health agency for low-cost vaccine information.

All children should routinely have an initial dose of MMR at 12 months of age and an additional dose at age 4-6 years (before entering kindergarten). Infants vaccinated with MMR before age 12 months should be revaccinated on or after the first birthday with one dose of MMR vaccine and then have an additional dose at age 4-6 years.

In Colorado, 84 percent of toddlers are vaccinated against measles.

People are considered immune to measles if they were born in the United States before 1957, previously had measles or have had two measles shots.

During 2008, more measles cases were reported in the United States than in any other year since 1997. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 90 percent of those infected had not been vaccinated, or their vaccination status was unknown.

Measles is one of the most infectious diseases in the world, and the virus travels easily through the air by way of coughing, sneezing and secretions from the mouth.

The United States may be on track to have more measles cases this year than any year in more than a decade, with almost all cases linked to other countries. Officials from the CDC report there already have been 89 cases of measles recorded this year. Due to strong vaccination rates, the United States normally sees only about 50 cases of measles in a year.

Symptoms of measles can start to appear between seven and 18 days after exposure. Early symptoms of measles are fever; runny nose; cough; and red, watery eyes. Usually, one to four days after the early symptoms, a red rash appears on the face and spreads to the rest of the body. A person with measles is contagious beginning four days before symptoms appear.