

WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT MEASLES?

We are in the midst of what has become a national controversy: to vaccinate or not to vaccinate for the measles. Scientifically, there is no controversy. Vaccines work! The measles vaccine is very safe, very effective and very necessary.

Measles is a highly contagious, acute and potentially deadly viral illness. There are 20 million cases each year worldwide. The 644 measles cases reported in the U.S. in 2014 is the largest number in the past 15 years, and more cases have been reported already in 2015 than at the same time in 2014. Babies under a year generally cannot get the measles vaccine but they are very vulnerable to measles and to complications from it. Complications, such as pneumonia or encephalitis, and even death can occur. People with immunocompromised conditions like leukemia and certain allergies can't get the vaccine and they are depending on others to have been vaccinated. This is known as herd immunity. However, herd immunity requires more than 90% of the population to be vaccinated, there are areas where the rate has dipped below 90%.

Measles is very easy to catch. Measles is highly contagious and spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is so contagious that if one person has it, 9 out of 10 people around him or her will also become infected if they are not protected. Infected people are contagious from 4 days **before** their rash starts (before they may even know they are ill) through 4 days afterwards. After an infected person leaves a location, the virus can live on surfaces and in the air, still able to infect someone else, for up to 2 hours.

There are social and economic costs to measles as well. People exposed to measles must be quarantined for 21 days to prevent the spread of the disease. The actual length of time out of school can stretch to a couple of months until the last case is finally identified. Children miss school and other activities for an extended period of time. Parents may have to find alternative child care or miss work; many people are still uninsured or under-insured and may have extra medical expenses, including hospitalization.

SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT GETTING THE VACCINE?

Maintaining high vaccination coverage is the best protection we have against disease outbreaks. MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine protects against all three. Currently, one in 12 children in the United States is not receiving their first dose of MMR on time. This is putting all the unvaccinated children, plus young babies, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems (people who have a true medical exemption from the vaccine) at greater risk.

The MMR vaccine is safe. More than 15 years of research has shown that the vaccine is definitely not linked to autism, or any other chronic condition. The MMR vaccine is very safe, very effective, very necessary.

The bottom line is that the measles vaccine works. Measles is not always a mild illness from which everyone recovers with no problems. Many people will experience a great deal of inconvenience, some people will suffer serious complications, and some will die. People who choose not to vaccinate are choosing a greater risk over a much lesser risk, and are putting many others at risk due to their choice.

Mother & Child Health Coalition and **Mid America Immunization Coalition** strongly urge anyone who has resisted having their children immunized to rethink their position, and to choose to protect the health of their own children, other people's children and our community.

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