

Measles – How do we fight it?

Measles has been essentially eliminated in the US since 2000.

However, there has been a resurgence of measles cases in the US and in Massachusetts in the last decade. So far this year, there have been 8 confirmed cases of measles in MA, including 2 residents of Middlesex County.

Why the increase in measles over the last decade? And why do we care?

A important contributor to the risk for measles spread in the US is due to people not vaccinating their children, by obtaining exemptions from school entry vaccination requirements. Exemptions from school entry vaccination requirements became more prevalent due to misconceptions about the link between vaccinations and autism, which has been disproven. Numerous studies have shown no link between autism and vaccines.

Case in point- a measles outbreak in Indiana in 2005 occurred after an unimmunized teenager traveled to Romania as part of a church group, and visited a hospital and orphanage. When she came home, she didn't realize that she was infected. The next day, when she was the most contagious, she attended a church gathering of about 500 people. Of the approximately 450 who had evidence of immunity, less than 1 percent came down with measles. Of the remaining 50 who did not, 32 percent became infected. Among the 35 church members whose parents had declined immunization, 31 eventually caught the virus — 16 of whom were infected that day. They didn't have face-to-face contact with the girl; all they had to do was inhabit her airspace within two hours of her having been there.

Confirmed Cases of Measles, 2003-2013

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0	2	0	19	1	2	2	3	24	0	1

What can you do to protect yourself and your family? Follow the CDC Recommendations for vaccination as follows:

- Children. Children should receive their first dose of Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccine at 12-15 months. School-aged children need two doses of MMR vaccine.

- Adults. Adults born after 1956 should have at least one dose of MMR vaccine. Certain groups at high risk need two doses of MMR, such as international travelers, health care workers, and college students. Adults born in the U.S. before 1957 are considered to be immune to measles from past exposures, but in situations of exposure to measles may benefit from a dose of MMR vaccine to be safer.

For additional information, contact Needham Public Health Department on line at <http://www.needhamma.gov/index.aspx?nid=85>.

Further information is available on the DPH website at www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/cdc/factsheets