Community and Health Services Department
Public Health Branch

February 23, 2015

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

Re: How to Protect Your Child Against Measles

In recent weeks a number of confirmed measles cases have been reported in Ontario. One of these cases is an adult who lives in York Region.

Though the risk to the general public related to this case is considered to be low, measles is a highly infectious disease and 95 per cent of the community needs to have immunity to prevent its spread. This applies to schools and is why York Region Public Health urges you to review your child's immunization record and to get them vaccinated if two doses of the Measles Mumps Rubella (MMR) vaccine have not been received.

What is Measles?

Measles is a very contagious infection that is easily spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can remain in the air for up to two hours after someone with measles has left the room.

The symptoms of measles develop approximately one to three weeks after exposure and include fever, cough, red watery eyes, and a red blotchy rash. Complications of measles can include ear infections, pneumonia, inflammation of the brain and death.

Check Your Child's Immunization Record

Vaccination with MMR vaccine is the best protection against measles. Every student in a York Region school should have received two doses of MMR vaccine after their first birthday, separated by at least 28 days

If your child does not have two doses of MMR vaccine, make an appointment with your family doctor for the shot. The vaccine is available **free-of-charge**. Take the opportunity to also ensure all of your child's vaccinations are up-to-date.

The Regional Municipality of York, 17250 Yonge Street, Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 6Z1
Tel: (905) 895-1231, 1-877-464-YORK (1-877-464-9675), Fax: (905) 898-5213
Internet: www.york.ca

For More Information about Measles

A measles fact sheet is attached. If you have further questions on measles, immunizations or any public health related issue, please visit www.york.ca or contact York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY: 1-866-252-9933. Regular business hours are Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Sincerely,

Leanne MacFarlane, RN, BScN
Acting Manager, Control of Infectious Diseases

Joy Marshall, MN
Manager, Control of Infectious Diseases

Measles Fact Sheet

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease and is sometimes called “hard measles” or “red measles” because of the presence of a red rash.

Most people recover completely from measles but the infection can cause complications such as ear infections, lung infections (pneumonia), inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) and death. If a pregnant woman gets measles, she may be at higher risk of having a miscarriage or premature delivery.

How is measles spread?

Measles is one of the most contagious infectious diseases. Measles spreads easily from person to person through droplets from the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. These airborne droplets spread through talking, coughing or sneezing.

Although less common, the virus can also spread through contact with items (such as tissues) that have been freshly soiled with nose and throat discharges.

A person with measles can spread the virus from four days before until four days after the rash has appeared.

How long does it take to become ill after exposure to the measles virus?

Symptoms usually appear seven to 21 days after exposure to a person contagious with measles.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Most infected people get a cough, runny nose, fever, red watery eyes, sensitivity to light and Koplik spots (small spots with a white center inside the mouth). A red, blotchy rash appears on the third to the seventh day, beginning at the hairline and spreading down the body to the arms and legs.

The rash disappears in the same order of appearance (head to foot) in about four to seven days. The illness lasts for about 10 days on average.

Disease is more severe in pregnant women, in the very young and among people with weakened immune systems.

How do I know that I have measles?

Measles is diagnosed by common signs and symptoms combined with laboratory tests.

Because measles is so contagious, call before visiting so your doctor can arrange your visit to prevent exposure to others in the waiting room.

Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Most people recover at home but care in hospital may be needed for severe infections.

Can I still go to school or work if I am infected?

A person with measles should stay home from school, work, or daycare and should not participate in any other activities outside the home until the fifth day after the rash appears.

How can measles be prevented?

Vaccination is the best protection against measles.

Who should get measles vaccine?

Anyone born in 1970 or later should receive two doses of measles containing vaccine (MMR and MMRV). Children are usually given the first MMR vaccine at 12 months of age and the second as MMRV between four to six years of age. Anyone 7 years of age and older should have received two doses of MMR separated by at least 28 days. Infants under 12 months of age should consult with their physician if they are travelling outside Canada.

It is generally assumed that adults born before 1970 were infected as children and have acquired natural immunity to measles. However if you are attending a post-secondary institution or you are travelling, you should receive one dose of MMR.

Regardless of age, health care workers and military recruits should have two doses of MMR.

Pregnant women and individuals with a weakened immune system should not be vaccinated with measles vaccine.

What can I do if I come in contact with someone with measles?

If you have had two doses of MMR you do not need to take any action. Those born before 1970 with a known history of measles infection or one dose of MMR vaccine do not need to take any action.

If you have never been vaccinated, get an MMR vaccine within 72 hours of contact with an infected person. This can lessen your chance of getting infected.

Infants under 12 months, pregnant women and individuals with a weakened immune system can receive an immunoglobulin injection within 6 days of coming into contact with measles. Immunoglobulin contains antibodies that can reduce the risk of becoming infected with measles.

How can I get more information about measles?

For further information please call York Region Public Health at 905-830-4444, ext. 73588 or speak to your healthcare provider.

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