Measles: What You Need to Know

The Rockland County Department of Health is responding to a measles outbreak in Rockland County. Since the end of September, there have been 95 confirmed, reported cases of measles in Rockland. The Health Department is actively working to contain the further spread of measles, closely coordinating our response with the New York State Department of Health to ensure the health and safety of all residents. These cases are presently clustered in New Square, Spring Valley, and Monsey, however due to Rockland County’s small geographic size, exposure to the measles may occur anywhere in the county.

What is measles?
Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus that is spread by direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected people. Measles can be dangerous, especially for babies and young children, as it can lead to pneumonia, brain damage, deafness, and death. Others who are at high risk for complications if they get the measles include pregnant women who are not immune, as well as those who have weakened immune systems. About one out of four people who get measles will be hospitalized.

What are the symptoms of measles?
Symptoms include a fever, rash, cough, conjunctivitis (red watery eyes) or runny nose. People are considered infectious from four days before to four days after the appearance of the rash. Symptoms usually appear 10 - 12 days after exposure but may appear as early as 7 days and as late as 21 days after exposure.

What is the best way to prevent measles?
The best way to prevent measles is to remain up-to-date with your measles vaccination. The Health Department encourages everyone to be up-to-date with the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine to help protect them in case of any future exposure to measles in Rockland. Measles is highly contagious, so ANYONE who is not protected against measles is at risk of getting the disease, and they may spread measles to people who cannot get vaccinated because they are too young or have specific health conditions.

Who is immune (not at risk) for getting measles?
Individuals are considered protected or immune to measles if they have had physician or provider-confirmed measles or have a lab test confirming immunity. Those born before 1957, and those who have received two doses of MMR vaccine, are also considered immune, however there is a very small chance that they may still get measles, but a much less severe case and much less likely to spread to others.

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What if I’m not sure if I’m immune?
If you are unsure if you are immune to measles, contact your health care provider.

What if I am not immune (am at risk) for getting measles? Get vaccinated!
- Routinely, everyone four years and older needs two doses of MMR vaccine unless there are contraindications (medical reasons not to get the vaccine). Two doses of the MMR vaccine can offer 97% protection from the measles.
- The first dose of MMR vaccine should be given at 12-15 months of age and the second dose should be given at four to six years of age (age of school entry), although individuals may also be vaccinated later in life.
- Because there is a measles outbreak in Rockland County, the Rockland County Department of Health is currently recommending:
  o Children 6 months through 11 months of age get an MMR vaccine now. They will still have to get a vaccine at 12-15 months of age and again at 4-6 years of age, however getting an MMR vaccine now will help give them some protection against measles.
  o Any child 6 months or older or any adult who has not received their first MMR vaccine yet should get their first MMR vaccine now.
  o Children 1 through 3 years of age who have already received their first MMR vaccine should get a second MMR vaccine now, as long as 28 days have passed since the first MMR vaccine was given to them. This second MMR vaccine will count for school entry.
In New York State, measles immunization is required of children enrolled in schools, daycare, and pre-kindergarten. Since August 1990, college students have also been required to demonstrate immunity against measles.

What should I do if I get sick?
If you are ill with a fever, rash, or conjunctivitis (red watery eyes) – help protect our community by staying home, not having visitors, and not going out in public. To prevent the spread of illness, the Department is advising individuals who may have been exposed and who have symptoms consistent with measles to contact their health care provider, a local clinic, or a local emergency department before going for care. This will help to prevent others at these facilities from being exposed to the illness. Those who develop symptoms are strongly urged to call their physician or other health care provider as measles is a reportable disease. This means that health care providers must contact our local health department. This is essential to contain this outbreak.

Where can I get more information?
For more information visit https://bit.ly/2zh4v1G or call the New York State Department of Health toll free Measles Information Line at (888) 364-4837.

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