

13 May 2014

To School Board Superintendents:

In the last several weeks, outbreaks of measles have been declared in several locations in Alberta. Measles is highly contagious and can be a serious illness. We know many of our schools have lower immunization rates than the target of 95% or better and can be places where measles spreads quickly. You may have seen the April 16 letter on this topic from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Talbot. We wanted to complement that letter with more specific information about how we would like to work with you to help protect your students, staff and visitors from this illness.

What can you do now?

- **Promote immunization** – Encourage staff to check their immunization records and parents to check records of their children. Children and those staff born in or after 1970 need two documented doses of vaccine given over the age of 12 months to be protected. Staff and parents can contact their local public health offices to get more information on records and how to get vaccine if they need it.
- **Increase awareness of measles** – This letter can be sent to all schools for dissemination to staff and parents to inform them of the situation. By being immunized, or by staying home if exposed and not immune, we are protecting those around us who cannot be immunized and who are at risk of the most serious complications. People being treated for cancer or taking medications that suppress the immune system and very young children rely on those around them to keep them safe from measles.
- **Continuity plans** – Consider developing processes to support students in continuing the school curriculum at home during an exclusion period.

What would happen if there were a case of measles in a school?

We would work with you to prevent further spread. The following are the ways we do this:

- **Post-exposure prophylaxis** – It may be possible to offer vaccine to non-immune people only if we identify the case of measles within 72 hours of an exposure. Note that it is always better to be immunized before an exposure, both because it provides better immunity, and because often we identify measles cases more than 72 hours after many people have already been exposed to measles.
- **Exclusion** – Those who are ill with measles must stay at home until no longer contagious. Those who are not immune and exposed to measles are required to stay home during the period of time in which they may develop the disease: from five days after first exposure through 21 days after the last exposure. By staying home from all public activities, this greatly reduces the risk of further spread of disease.

What is the exclusion process?

1. Public Health, under the direction of the Medical Officer of Health will ask principals for **attendance lists** for both students and staff (e.g., volunteers, teachers, assistants, custodians, librarians, administration) for the dates that the confirmed case attended school while infectious. This will include a request for current mailing addresses of all individuals, dates of birth and their **emergency contact information**.
2. We will cross-reference the list against public health immunization records, and identify all those for whom Alberta Health Services (AHS) does NOT have a record of two doses of measles vaccine, at the appropriate ages.
3. We will directly contact exposed adults and the parents/guardians of students and/or children for whom AHS does NOT have immunization records. These persons will be asked to send documentation to AHS of immunizations received elsewhere. (For example, official immunization records documenting vaccines given outside of Alberta)
4. Those who cannot provide evidence of immunity to measles will be considered non-immune, and will be excluded from school until 21 days have passed following the last exposure, or until the individual can demonstrate immunity to the satisfaction of the Medical Officer of Health.
5. We will send a list of excluded individuals to the school principal, with updates regularly as needed.
6. We will continue to work closely with you throughout the duration of the exclusion period to ensure you have all the information you need.

Thank-you in advance for your cooperation and support.

For more information regarding measles please call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465 or visit the AHS website at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9842.asp>.

Sincerely



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