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Measles information from Health Alerts sent to potentially exposed persons

May 3, 2010

What is measles?

Measles (also called rubeola) is a very easily spread viral disease. People usually start to get symptoms about 10 to 12 days after being exposed to an infectious person, but they can get sick as early as 7 days or as late as 21 days after being exposed. People with measles can get a runny nose, cough, fatigue and fever. Their eyes may become red and watery. The fever can be very high (103-105°F). Two to four days later, a red blotchy rash appears, lasting 5 to 7 days. The rash usually begins on the face and then spreads over the entire body. People with measles can spread the disease to others from four days before the rash starts (before they know they have the disease), through 4 days after the rash begins. Measles is spread by sharing the same airspace with the person while they are infectious with measles—for example, being in the same home, classroom, clinic waiting room, or being in these areas for up to 2 hours after the infectious person was present.

What happens when people are exposed to measles cases?

People who are not protected against measles and who were exposed may be required to stay at home under quarantine so that they do not spread the disease to others. The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH), Communicable Disease Control and Prevention Section, will work with relevant parties to determine who was exposed to measles or suspected measles AND is not protected against measles.

How do you know if someone is protected against measles?

1. They had measles in the past, and have medical records to prove it.
2. They received 2 doses of measles-containing vaccine in the past (often given as MMR [measles-mumps-rubella] vaccine) and have medical records to prove it.
3. They were born before 1957.

If someone meets any of the 3 criteria above, they are likely protected from getting measles from this exposure.

What will happen if I (or my child) is not protected against measles and was exposed?

- If you are pregnant or if you/your child is immune compromised, we may recommend getting immunoglobulin (IG) within a specific time frame, to prevent your getting sick with measles. Contact your obstetrician or physician as soon as possible to let him or her know that you may have been exposed to measles and may need IG. Please bring this letter with you.
- If you are healthy, NOT pregnant, and NOT immune compromised, you do not need IG. Getting vaccinated with measles vaccine (or MMR) is unlikely to protect you from getting sick from a recent exposure, but will protect you from future exposures.
- Whether you (or your child) are healthy, pregnant, or immune compromised, if you (or your child) is not protected from measles and was exposed as determined by the department of public health, you may be required to stay at home for a specified period. If so, you will be contacted by the SFDPH to explain what the restrictions will be on you/your child, what monitoring steps should be followed, and what your household members should do.
- You or your child may get sick from measles, anytime from 7 to 18 days after exposure (possibly longer, if you/they received IG). If you or your child develops early symptoms of measles--cough, fever, runny nose, or watery eyes—during this time, **stay home. Do not go to work, school, offices, shops, childcare, places of religious worship, or any social gatherings.** Contact your doctor or medical clinic by phone to tell them that you have been exposed to a measles case. Also, call the San Francisco Department of Public Health, Communicable Disease Control Unit at 415-554-2830 or your local health department, immediately.

Some additional frequently asked questions about measles:

What are the complications associated with measles? Can it be treated?

Pneumonia occurs in up to 6 percent of reported cases. Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), middle ear infections, and seizures may also occur. There is no specific treatment for measles.

Who can get it?

Although measles is usually a childhood illness, it can happen at any age. Anyone who hasn't had measles or a vaccine for measles can get it. 90-98% of people who get one dose of vaccine will be protected. Up to 99% of the people will be fully protected after they get two doses of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine.