



For more information, contact: **Jessica Davies, 308-760-6492** or [jdavies@pphd.ne.gov](mailto:jdavies@pphd.ne.gov)

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For Immediate Release:

### ***Measles Cases Continue to Rise in the US: What Panhandle Residents Need to Know***

Measles was declared eliminated in the United States in the year 2000. Even though no cases have been found in Nebraska, nearby states have been affected. That makes it important for us to stay safe and take steps to protect ourselves. As of today, cases have been reported in 24 of the 50 states, including neighboring states Kansas and Colorado.

Panhandle Public Health District is actively monitoring the situation and urging all residents to review their immunization status and take proactive measures to protect themselves and their families from measles and other preventable diseases.

#### **What Is Measles?**

As a quick review, measles is a highly contagious viral illness that primarily affects the respiratory system. The disease is characterized by a range of symptoms that can include high fever, cough, runny nose, red, watery eyes, and a rash that spreads from the head to the feet. In some cases, small white spots known as Koplik spots may appear inside the mouth before the rash develops.

Local physician Dr. Sondra Holloway states, "Measles complications include immune suppression and secondary infection, pneumonia, neurologic complications like encephalitis (brain swelling), eye complications such as blindness, and inflammation of the heart."

**If you suspect that you might have measles, please call your health care provider or PPHD at 308-633-2866 to get more guidance on the next steps that you should take.**

#### **Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) Vaccine is Our Number One Form of Protection**

To ensure protection against measles, the following immunization schedule is recommended:

- **First Dose:** Administered at 12 to 15 months of age
- **Second Dose:** Administered at 4 to 6 years of age

"When measles vaccination rates drop below 95%, the risk of an outbreak rises. The MMR vaccine is a safe and effective way to protect everyone, especially young children, from measles and its serious health risks," shared Jessica Davies, MPH, Health Director of PPHD.

#### **Who is Considered Immune to Measles?**

Not everyone needs another MMR shot. Your birth year can help determine your immunity

- **Born before 1957?** You're considered immune because measles was common during that time.

- **Born between 1963–1967?** You may have received an older version of the vaccine and might need a second dose—but this only applies to a small number of people
- **Born between 1968–1989?** You probably got one dose of the MMR vaccine, which provides strong protection (about 93%).
  - You only need a second dose if you're at higher risk—like working in healthcare, going to college, or traveling internationally)
- **Born after 1989?** You likely received two doses of the MMR vaccine and are fully protected

Please contact PPHD at 308-633-2866 or your physician if you have any questions or unsure about your vaccination status.

### **There's No Treatment for Measles—Only Prevention**

Dr. Holloway reminds residents, “There is no treatment for measles. Vitamin A can be administered by healthcare providers as a supportive measure, but neither vitamin A nor cod liver oil can prevent measles.”

Instead, Holloway encourages being up to date on the MMR vaccine as the most effective way to prevent the spread of measles to protect yourself, your family, and your community.

### **What Are Vitamin A and Cod Liver Oil?**

- **Vitamin A** is a nutrient that helps support vision, immunity, and cell growth. In measles cases, it's sometimes given by health care providers to help reduce the severity of symptoms—especially in children who are malnourished.
- **Cod liver oil** is a dietary supplement that contains Vitamin A and D. While it has general health benefits, it does **not** prevent measles or act as treatment once someone is infected.

Call your local vaccine provider or PPHD at 308-633-2866 for questions regarding immunizations. No insurance? Ask about the Vaccine for Children's (VFC) program.

Residents are encouraged to:

- **Verify Vaccination Status:** Review personal and family immunization records on the Nebraska State Immunization Information System here [https://nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov/prd\\_ir/public/clientSearch.do?language=en](https://nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov/prd_ir/public/clientSearch.do?language=en). You can also call PPHD at 308-633-2866 or your vaccine provider.
- **Seek Medical Advice:** Consult healthcare providers if exposure to measles is suspected or if symptoms such as high fever, cough, runny nose, and rash occur.
- **Stay Informed:** Follow updates from PPHD for any further notices or changes to public health recommendations.

### **Planning Travel?**

PPHD encourages that if you or your family is planning to travel, especially travel internationally or to areas with high incidence of measles such as West Texas, ensure they are up to date on their MMR vaccine.

**For infants traveling internationally or to outbreak areas: MMR can be given as early as 6 months—speak to a healthcare provider for more information.**

This is a continually evolving issue and PPHD will do their best to keep you up to date with response efforts. If you would like to monitor the measles outbreak in the US more closely, you can visit this CDC page: <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>.

**Need more Information?**

For more information about measles please visit the CDC page for measles at <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html>.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. Visit our website [www.pphd.ne.gov](http://www.pphd.ne.gov).