

February 24, 2015

Dear Parent:

At least 154 people in seven states have been diagnosed with measles since the recent measles outbreak at Disneyland. This includes six people in Washington State. While we don't have any cases of measles in Pierce County at this time, we are on alert.

During outbreaks of measles, we are concerned about transmission to:

- Babies who are too young to receive measles vaccine.
- People who cannot receive measles vaccine for medical reasons.
- A small percentage of people who received measles vaccine but are not immune to the disease.

Measles is very contagious and is transmitted by small droplets that can float in the air for hours. Infected people are contagious four days before they break out in the rash. To prevent ongoing spread of measles, more than 95 percent of people must be immune.

Several schools in Pierce County are highly vulnerable to a measles outbreak because they have measles vaccine coverage significantly below 95 percent. Unprotected students can easily become ill and readily spread the disease to others.

A single case of measles in one of those schools could result in a large outbreak in Pierce County. In the event of one or two cases at your school, the Pierce County Health Officer will not allow students who are not vaccinated against measles to attend school during an outbreak. This is typically at least three weeks and as long as six weeks after the last case is diagnosed.

Unless your child cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons, please make sure that your child has received two doses of measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR). This will help protect not only your child, but also other people in your family, school and community.

It is important to keep in mind that measles is a very serious disease. During 2011, 40 percent of people with measles in the United States were hospitalized with complications like pneumonia, ear infection and meningitis. In 2013 an estimated 145,700 deaths due to measles occurred worldwide. As part of our mission to safeguard and enhance the health of the communities of Pierce County, we want to do everything possible to protect your children and our community from this disease.

Please contact your child's health care provider or visit Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department website at www.tpchd.org/immunizations for information about vaccines and locations of free vaccine clinics.

Sincerely,



Anthony L-T Chen, MD, MPH
Director of Health
Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department