



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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## **Alabama pediatricians join Public Health in urging immunization for measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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In light of the recent measles outbreak associated with Disneyland in California, the Alabama Department of Public Health reminds parents of the vital importance of vaccinating their children according to the immunization schedule of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. No patients in Alabama have contracted measles linked to the Disneyland outbreak so far, but the outbreak has led to at least 67 cases, many in children who did not have the recommended vaccination against the virus. Before 2013 approximately 60 people in the United States were reported as having measles each year; however, this number more than tripled to around 189 people infected with the disease in 2013 and 644 cases reported nationally for 2014. The total number of measles infections last year was at a 20-year high.

Measles can stay airborne or live on surfaces for up to two hours. Symptoms include fever, runny nose, cough and a rash all over the body. Those infected can transmit the virus for about five days before the typical rash appears. Symptoms occur within one to two weeks after exposure. Measles is so contagious that any child who is exposed to it and is not immune will probably get the disease.

Dr. Michael Ramsey, president of the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said, "The pediatricians of this state are concerned about the risk of a measles outbreak and support public health in emphasizing the need for children to be up to date on all vaccines."

State law requires children to be up to date on their vaccinations prior to attending school, and adolescents and college students must also be up to date on their MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) immunizations.

"People who get measles disease put others who are not vaccinated at risk" Dr. Karen Landers, pediatrician and medical consultant for the Alabama Department of Public Health Immunization Division, said. "Fortunately, we in Alabama currently have a high rate of vaccination. However, we will see a measles outbreak in this state if children are not vaccinated. "

The 2013-14 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention immunization survey found more than

92 percent of Alabama's kindergartners had received the MMR vaccination. Religious exemptions were filed for 447 kindergarten students and 70 others had medical exemptions from vaccinations.

Common complications of measles are ear infections and less often pneumonia. Rarer complications are inflammation of the brain and death. Routine MMR vaccination is recommended for all children, with the first dose given at age 12-15 months, and a second dose at age 4-6 years. Unless they have other evidence of immunity, adults born after 1956 should get at least one dose of MMR vaccine. Two appropriately spaced doses of MMR vaccine are recommended for health care personnel, college students and international travelers.

In addition, communities with pockets of unvaccinated people are vulnerable to measles outbreaks. At least 95 percent of people in a community need to be immunized to achieve herd immunity that not only protects the people who received the vaccine, but also children too young to be vaccinated and those who do not respond to the vaccine.

Dr. Landers said parents who fear side effects of vaccinations should know that highly contagious measles is a serious disease with life-threatening complications, and concerns about links between vaccines and autism are baseless. "I can say as a scientist and as a pediatrician that the measles vaccine does not cause autism."

Where possible, persons suspected of having measles should be promptly screened before entering medical waiting rooms and appropriately isolated, or have their office appointments scheduled at the end of the day to prevent exposure of other patients.

For more information, contact your local health department or visit [adph.org/immunization/](http://adph.org/immunization/).