



DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND SUPPORT SERVICES
CITY OF CHICAGO

February 9, 2015

Dear Parents and Staff of Head Start and Early Head Start Children,

As the Medical Consultant for Head Start I am encouraging all of you to check the immunization records for the children and yourselves to determine if you or your children are at risk for contracting Measles during this epidemic. Your health care provider can give your further direction. Please read the information below.

WHAT IS MEASLES? Measles is a preventable communicable disease caused by the measles virus. It is a respiratory disease that can have serious life-threatening complications. In the year 2000 measles was eliminated and declared no longer endemic (common disease) in the United States. Therefore the recent confirmed cases of measles in the United States are considered part of an epidemic (more than usually expected). In the past week there have been 5 confirmed cases of Measles in Palatine in infants that attend the same day care center. These infants are too young to routinely receive the Measles vaccination.

ROUTINE IMMUNIZATIONS: The Measles vaccination (immunization) is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Council on Immunization Practices. The initial dose is between 12 and 15 months. The second or booster is recommended between 4 and six years of age. Children receiving the measles immunization following this schedule are 95% likely to have immunity against Measles. See <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/>

IMMUNIZING THE COMMUNITY: Infants under the age of 12 months have no significant immunity against measles. **This is why it is so important that all other children and adults receive these immunizations.** The reason this is effective is “Herd Immunity”. This means that all others around the unvaccinated person are immune and should not catch disease. Hence the community or “herd” shelters the weakest one(s) from the disease by not exposing them. All eligible children should be vaccinated against Measles as well as adults with no history of vaccination or physician diagnosed history of Measles.

RISK COMPLICATIONS OF MEASLES: The risk of complications of Measles is highest in young infants and those over 20 years of age. The complications may be something manageable like an ear infection, suffered by one in 20 children with Measles. A more serious and life threatening complication is pneumonia. Pneumonia is the Measles complication that most often leads to death. Encephalitis (swelling of the brain) is suffered by 1 in a thousand persons with Measles and may lead to brain damage and/or death.



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CURRENT EPIDEMIC: The source of the current epidemic in Palatine Illinois is not yet clear. However other cases around the country have been linked to unimmunized persons traveling to other countries where Measles is not unusual and unknowingly becoming infected. Now it is being diagnosed right here at home. Please review the records of the children and yourselves and get vaccinated if needed. This will help slow and hopefully stop the current epidemic we are having.

Sincerely,

Joyce M. Smith, M.D., MPH
DFSS Head Start Medical Consultant