



Kiowa County Health Department

### **For Immediate Release**

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### **Preventing the Measles Outbreak in Oklahoma**

In the wake of a recent measles outbreak, in California and thirteen other states, the Kiowa County Health Department is underscoring the importance of being vaccinated against the disease. The disappearance of many childhood diseases has led some parents to question whether vaccines are still necessary and if they are safe. Some parents choose to delay vaccines or withhold them altogether from their children. This inaction places not just their own children but other children at risk of getting serious diseases, even while scientific evidence overwhelmingly shows these vaccines are safe.

“With the recent measles outbreak, we are reminded that childhood vaccinations are critical to not only the child but also the health of a community,” said Brandie O’Connor, Regional Director of Kiowa County Health Department. Public health officials in California have confirmed a total of 59 cases of measles in California residents since the end of December 2014. The majority of people who got measles were not vaccinated. Currently, there are no reported cases of measles in Oklahoma. The last reported case of measles in the state was in 1997.

Measles is spread from person-to-person by airborne droplets, commonly from a contagious person coughing or sneezing; by direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected persons; or through touching surfaces contaminated with these secretions. Infected people can spread the disease usually four days before their rash starts to four days after rash onset.

Symptoms of measles include a high fever and a red blotchy rash starting on the face then spreading to the rest of the body. Symptoms begin to appear about 10 to 12 days after exposure to the virus. Individuals first experience a fever lasting about two to four days then followed by the onset of cough, runny nose, and/or conjunctivitis. The rash usually appears about 14 days after exposure and lasts four to seven days. It begins at the hairline, and then involves the face and upper neck. Over the next three days, the rash gradually proceeds downward and outward, reaching the hands and feet. Symptoms may last for one to two weeks. There is no treatment for measles; however, health care providers may treat the symptoms of measles with bed rest, plenty of fluids, and anti-fever medications.

About one out of 10 children with measles also gets an ear infection, and up to one out of 20 gets pneumonia. One out of every 2,000 will develop encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Coma due to measles encephalitis may last for weeks or months. For every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die.

Persons who are not vaccinated are definitely at risk of getting the disease. “We strongly recommend that all parents vaccinate their children with MMR vaccine, if they have not already done so. The first dose is recommended at 12 to 15 months of age, so babies who have reached their first birthday can receive the vaccine now; there is no reason to wait,” O’Connor said.



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Ninety-four percent of Oklahoma toddlers (19 through 35 months of age) have received one dose of measles vaccine and 97 percent of children entering kindergarten in Oklahoma have received two doses. Measles is extremely contagious. The small number of unvaccinated children won't be protected if the measles virus gets into the community. Public Health officials consider the six percent of Oklahoma toddlers who haven't received the vaccine to be at risk. The second dose of MMR is recommended at 4 to 6 years of age or before entering kindergarten. "All children 4 years of age or older who have not received a second dose of MMR can get it now," said O'Connor.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health recommends that children receive MMR vaccine from their regular health care provider, clinic, or county health department. For more information on measles, visit [www.health.ok.gov](http://www.health.ok.gov) or contact the Kiowa County Health Department at 580-726-3316.

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