

Grays Harbor County Public Health & Social Services

Measles

Questions and Answers

MAY 2019



What is happening right now?

- On May 12, 2019 Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department confirmed a case of measles in a Pierce County resident.
- No cases of measles have been identified in Grays Harbor County.
- For more information on the Pierce County case, including exposure sites, visit Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department's website at <https://www.tpchd.org/Home/Components/News/News/126/286?backlist=/home>.

What can I do to prevent measles?

- You can protect yourself and your family by ensuring everyone has the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine.
- Over 95% of babies who get their first MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccination at 12 months of age are protected against measles. Over 99% are protected for a lifetime after their second MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccination.

What is Grays Harbor County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) doing about the current measles case?

- PHSS staff are closely monitoring information about the measles case in Pierce County, Washington.

- We regularly fax information about measles cases to our local health care providers so that they know what is happening and can consider measles as a possible diagnosis when they are evaluating a rash illness.
- We consult with health care providers who have questions about measles diagnosis.
- We provide information and education to members of the public.
- We investigate probable and confirmed measles cases and ensure that measures are taken to reduce the spread of disease.

When would a health care provider test for measles?

- When a person goes to a medical provider, the provider will assess their symptoms. Some of the symptoms of measles are also seen in other common illnesses.
- Providers will test for measles if the patient has all of the symptoms of measles and if they have been in an area with a current outbreak or was recently in close contact with someone who has measles.
- Some providers may test for measles even if the patient does not have all of the symptoms and even if they have not been in close contact with a person who has measles – just to be 100% sure they can rule measles out.

What happens if a health care provider suspects that a person has measles?

- If a health care provider suspects that a patient might have measles, they will order lab tests that will confirm or rule out measles. The lab test may take a few days to complete.

- They may also ask the patient to stay home and limit the people they are in close contact with until they get the test results.
- The law requires health care providers and laboratories to report any probable or confirmed cases of measles to PHSS immediately.
- PHSS can receive reports from health care providers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What is a “case” of measles?

- In public health, a “case” is a person who has a diagnosis of a contagious disease that meets specific, defined criteria.
- A “probable case” of measles is defined as someone who, *in the absence of a more likely diagnosis*, has the symptoms of measles (fever more than 101 degrees, cough, runny nose, red watery eyes, and tiredness followed by a rash over the entire body that lasts more than 3 days).
- A “confirmed case” of measles is defined as someone who has the symptoms of measles along with positive results to specific lab tests that confirm that the person is currently infected.

How are patients informed about a measles diagnosis?

- Patients may receive paperwork that says their doctor saw them for “measles” but that is not the same as a diagnosis of measles.
- A diagnosis of measles is made when lab results confirm the illness is measles. The health care provider will contact the patient directly to share the information from the lab result.

When would PHSS announce a case of measles to the public?

- When there is a suspect or confirmed case of measles, we contact the person who is ill to conduct a thorough disease investigation. In investigations we work to identify places the person has been and people the person has been around during the period of time they are contagious.
- This helps us identify and communicate with every person that has been in contact with the person who is contagious.
- If the person was in a public place that exposed a group of people who couldn't be identified individually (like a carnival), we would announce the date, time, and location to the public so that people who were there could contact us.