



May 13, 2019

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I would like to take this opportunity to provide an update on the current measles outbreak in California to encourage all unvaccinated children receive the measles vaccine as soon as possible, and to outline expectations should there be a case of measles in a Sonoma County school. I also write this letter to emphasize to parents and guardians the seriousness of this current measles outbreak and the potential impact to unvaccinated or under vaccinated children.

As of May 10, 2019, there have been 44 cases in California and over 750 cases in the U.S. in 2019. This is the highest number of cases since measles was nearly eliminated in 2000. Several Bay Area counties have reported cases in this outbreak. Sonoma County has been spared thus far, but we are vulnerable. Although childhood vaccination rates are 94 percent overall, in some County schools less than half of students are up to date with the recommended vaccination schedule.

Measles is a very contagious airborne illness and is highly preventable through vaccination. The virus is spread by sharing the same air with an infected person, especially if that person coughs or sneezes. Individuals are contagious four days before they develop a rash and may unknowingly make others ill.

Measles usually starts with a high fever, runny nose, red and irritated eyes, and then a rash. The rash is red and bumpy, starts on the face and moves down the body. Even in previously healthy children, measles can cause serious illness requiring hospitalization. Common complications are ear or throat infections. Less common but more serious complications are pneumonia and brain swelling. In some cases it can even be fatal.

The best way to prevent measles is the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine. Children routinely get their first dose of the MMR vaccine at 12-15 months of age, and the second dose before beginning kindergarten. This combination is about 97 percent effective in preventing measles. I would also like to emphasize the MMR vaccine has a long established history of being safe and effective.

If your child is unvaccinated or cannot provide laboratory confirmation of measles immunity and there is a case in their school, they will likely **be excluded from attending school for 21 days** after their last exposure to the contagious individual. This exclusion helps protect the susceptible students and limits further spread of disease.

Measles is more common abroad, and Sonoma County hosts visitors from all over the world and our residents are frequent travelers, which increases the chances of coming into contact with the disease. If you plan to travel abroad, I highly recommend checking the CDC website's page on measles and before your trip at <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html>.

It takes two weeks to develop immunity after receiving a measles vaccine. Unvaccinated or under vaccinated children should be vaccinated as soon as possible through their healthcare provider so they will have protection, will not further spread illness and will not need to be absent from school.

As your Health Officer, I would like to thank you for doing your part to keep families in Sonoma County healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Philip', written in a cursive style.

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH  
Sonoma County Health Officer