

JUNE 19, 2019

CDC: Travelers Beware; Measles Outbreak Is Global

By Anna DeNelsky

The CDC released a notice alerting that the measles outbreak has gone global, strongly advising susceptible people to seek protection through vaccination prior to travel abroad.

An increased number of measles cases around the world pose a threat to unvaccinated travelers and to unvaccinated individuals in the United States who come in contact with returning infected travelers, the agency said. Therefore, health care providers should urge travelers and their companions to receive the measles-containing vaccine, or confirm evidence of measles immunity if uncertain, at least one month before visiting other countries.

Two types of measles-containing vaccines are available in the United States: the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR; M-M-R II, Merck) vaccine and the measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMRV; Proquad, Merck) vaccine. The MMRV vaccine can only be given to children aged 12 months through 12 years. The CDC advises that clinicians check for evidence of vaccination before their patients' departures and vaccinate travelers according to the CDC's recommendations:

- Infants aged 6 months through 11 months should be given one dose of the MMR vaccine, which does not count as the first dose in the routine childhood vaccination series.
- People aged 12 months or older without evidence of prior vaccination should be given two appropriately spaced doses of the vaccine.
- People aged 12 months or older with documentation of only one dose should be given one additional dose.

The CDC reminded travelers that any place where people gather—airports, buses and trains, tourist attractions—even if there is no measles outbreak occurring in that country, attracts tourists from countries that are seeing outbreaks. Therefore, vaccination is critical for all international travelers, regardless of destination.

Symptoms of measles include rash, high fever, and a cough, runny nose, or red, watery eyes. Individuals are contagious up to four days before and four days after they have a rash. The disease can lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia and death.

In related news, *Pediatrics* published an article concerning the record number of measles cases reported in Europe. The epidemiologists said low vaccination coverage in previous years is the biggest culprit of the outbreak surge (*Pediatrics* (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2019/06/13/peds.2019-0414>) 2019 Jun 17. [Epub ahead of print]).

From January to June 2018, the World Health Organization European Region countries reported more than 41,000 measles cases, including 37 deaths. Ukraine reported the highest number of cases, yet France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, the Russian Federation and Serbia were also among countries experiencing a significant outbreak. For updates, click [here](#).

The numbers continued to increase, and in the first two months of 2019 alone, 34,400 measles cases were reported in 42 European countries, 25,000 of which were located in Ukraine, including 13 deaths. By March 2019, the European Region counted a total of 83,540 cases and 74 related deaths, a significant increase in the number of infected individuals compared with 2017 and 2016. In 2017, 25,869 cases of measles led to 42 deaths, and in 2016, 5,273 cases led to 13 deaths. Although the European Region reached its highest estimated coverage for the second dose of the vaccine in 2017 with 90% of the region protected, outbreak countries have experienced a decline in overall routine vaccination coverage, low coverage among some marginalized groups, and immunity gaps in older populations.

To eliminate the spread of measles and ensure community safety, the European Vaccine Action Plan 2015-2020 states that at least 95% of individuals in every population must have received two doses of vaccination before exposure to measles. The WHO Regional Office for Europe continues to work with countries in the region to improve their disease prevention systems by ensuring equitable access to vaccination, educating health workers,

identifying unvaccinated individuals, strengthening the public's trust in vaccines and addressing concerns, enhancing outbreak detection and response, and securing access to affordable immunity.

According to WHO, "If outbreak response is not timely and comprehensive, the virus will find its way into more pockets of vulnerable individuals and potentially spread to additional countries within and beyond the Region." The organization warns that "as long as measles continues to circulate anywhere in the world, no country can avoid importation, but they can protect their populations through high routine and supplemental immunization coverage of susceptible individuals."

Due to the fact that vaccination is the only way to prevent the disease, as there is no specific antiviral treatment for measles, WHO advises that "every opportunity should be used to vaccinate susceptible children, adolescents and adults."

The United States so far has confirmed more than 1,000 cases. Many involved importations or exposure to international visitors to the United States. The United States is experiencing so many cases of measles, it might lose its measles-elimination rating.

For more on measles

Read our review article from Dr. Paul Offit's team: [Measles: A Serious Highly Contagious Infection Makes a Comeback](#)