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KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I

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In reply, please refer to:
File:

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

With the increasing risk of measles reaching Hawaiʻi, we strongly encourage you to consider getting your child vaccinated against measles if your child is not fully vaccinated to help protect your child and the community.

A high vaccination rate is the best way to prevent an outbreak. Accordingly, the Hawaiʻi State Department of Health (DOH) is preparing emergency rules that, for the 120 days that emergency rules can be in effect, a child with a religious exemption can receive the vaccine against measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) and retain their religious exemption.

Why are you doing this now?

Measles outbreaks and cases have been increasing. In 2023, there were four outbreaks and 59 cases. In 2024, there were 16 outbreaks and 285 cases. As of March 28, 2025, 483 measles cases have been reported from 20 states (https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html).

Measles is one of the most contagious viruses known, and a population vaccination rate of at least 95% is needed to prevent an outbreak. The measles vaccination rate for Hawaiʻi is 90%, lower than the Texas and national average of 93%. Based on the National Immunization Survey, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calculates state vaccination and exemption rates and trends, which are available at: https://www.cdc.gov/schoolvaxview/data/index.html. These are average rates, which can differ by school.

How does this impact my child?

Certain schools in Hawaiʻi have low vaccination rates, making them at risk for measles and other disease outbreaks. Should an outbreak occur in Hawaiʻi, students without evidence of an up-to-date measles vaccination may be excluded from school based on DOH directives.

Families and staff can access vaccines by:

- Contacting their child's preferred healthcare provider,
- or local community clinic.

They can also use the CDC's vaccine locator (https://www.vaccines.gov/en/) to identify a location to access care. Schools and offices interested in hosting onsite vaccination clinics can call the DOH Immunization Branch at (808) 586-8300.

Please help us keep your child safe, healthy, and in school by staying current with recommended immunizations. Mahalo for doing your part to protect our keiki, families, and community from vaccine-preventable diseases like measles.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kemble

Sarah K. Kemble, MD
State Epidemiologist
Department of Health

ABOUT MEASLES



The best defense

Vaccination continues to be the best defense against measles. While no vaccine is 100% effective, on average the MMR vaccine **protects 97 out of 100 people** from getting sick and from spreading the virus if they are exposed to measles. If your child has received **2 doses of MMR vaccine**, no additional doses are needed. If you are unsure of your child's vaccination status, or have less than 2 doses of MMR vaccine, contact your healthcare provider to schedule.



What about adults?

Adult family members are also recommended to check their measles immunization status. Adults **born in 1957 or later** who don't have evidence of immunity should receive at least 1 dose of MMR vaccine. You do not need to be vaccinated if:

- you were born before 1957
- have documentation of vaccination with at least 1 dose of measles, mumps, and rubella-containing vaccine
- have had prior laboratory confirmed measles infection
- your healthcare provider performed a blood test to check your immunity and has documented that you are immune.



How safe is the MMR vaccine?

The MMR vaccine has been in use for **more than 50 years**, and it is safe. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. These are usually mild and go away on their own. More serious side effects are rare. The potential risk of harm from measles infection is far greater than the potential risk from the measles vaccine. Scientists in the United States and other countries have carefully studied the MMR vaccine. None has found a link between autism and the MMR vaccine.



How do you contract measles?

Measles is easily spread through coughs, sneezes, or even just being in the same room. Common symptoms include fever, cough, runny nose, pink eyes, and rash that starts on the hairline of head and spreads down the rest of the body. Although less common, measles can cause **hospitalization** for 1 in 5 infected, **ear infections** that can lead to hearing loss for 1 in 10, **pneumonia** for 1 in 20, **encephalitis** (brain swelling) for 1 in 1,000, and **death** for 1-3 in 1,000. You can learn more about measles at: https://www.cdc.gov/measles/ and https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/measles/.



What to do if infected?

Infected people may spread measles for four days before the rash starts and four days after. If you suspect your child has measles, contact the school and keep them at home. Notify your child's healthcare provider and if instructed to come to the facility, put a mask on your child, and make sure the provider notifies the DOH. Once infected, your child will need to be kept away from others (either at home or in a medical setting depending on the severity of disease) and monitored to ensure that they do not develop life-threatening disease. If an outbreak here in Hawai'i does occur, we may need to protect all unvaccinated children by having them stay home during an outbreak.