COLUMBUS COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Special Feature
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Measles: A public health issue

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – The measles is not a political topic — it is a public health issue.

While the disease was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000, it is now back: There have been two confirmed measles deaths recently, and neither of the people who died had any other medical issues that might have contributed to their death.

The measles is a very contagious illness that spreads quickly from respiratory droplets — much like a cold. If you have the disease, you are contagious a few days before you first notice symptoms, and remain contagious for about four days after you feel better. The illness typically runs its course in about 14 days.

The early symptoms of the disease include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Pink eyes without eye drainage

After you have had symptoms for a few days, you typically develop high fevers of 104 F or above and spots that spread throughout your mouth, called Koplik spots.The next phase of the disease is a slightly raised rash starting on your face and moving down the body. You may also develop enlarged lymph nodes, and an increasing cough and sore throat that occur at the same time.

In most cases, the rash turns from red to dark brown and starts to peel off. As the rash goes away, symptoms begin to decrease, but the cough can continue for an additional 2-4 weeks.

While the worst complication from measles is death, there are many other long-term effects from this illness — especially in children. It can cause a weakened immune system; chronic ear infections and gastroenteritis (vomiting and diarrhea); inflammation of the brain; and keratitis, an inflammation of the cornea that can cause blindness. Measles can also lead to pneumonia, which is the most common cause of major respiratory problems and death.

Fortunately, there is a vaccine to prevent this illness. Children receive the measles vaccine at 12 months of age, which gives them 93% protection. They receive a second booster between 4 and 6 years of age, which boosts their immunity to 97%.

Some children are unable to receive the vaccine because of other health conditions, which means they are at high risk if the disease appears in their community. It's important for us to achieve high vaccine rates once again and eliminate the threat of measles in our country.

It is ultimately a parent's decision whether they want to vaccinate their child; however, most doctors recommend it and have faith in the safety of the vaccine for measles. These doctors have all chosen to vaccinate their own children.

If you have concerns about vaccines or measles, please research reputable sites and talk to your family doctor. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) is a great educational website for parents looking for information on vaccines.

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