Measles: Common Questions and Answers for Families and Staff

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To ensure student and staff safety during a measles outbreak, The Jefferson County Health Department will be proactive in directions in contact tracing and exposure protocols. This document provides essential guidance for navigating these situations, specifically regarding:

- **Contact Tracing & Exposure:** How we identify shared airspace and the steps taken when a student is flagged as a close contact.
- **Quarantine Timelines:** Understanding the 21-day monitoring window and how to calculate quarantine periods during ongoing household exposure.
- **Prevention & Health:** Strategies for monitoring symptoms, meeting state vaccination requirements, and protecting vulnerable family members.

When health officials identify a case of measles in our school, we work closely with administration and the Jefferson County Health Department to ensure the safety of our students and staff. Below are the answers to the most common questions regarding our contact tracing.

Q: How long does measles virus linger in a room
A: If an infected person coughs or sneezes the contagion will linger in the air for up to 2 hours

Q: Who is at risk of contracting measles if they are in or enter the room during the two hour period?
A: Anyone that is not protected with immunization has a 90% chance of contracting the measles.

Q: What is contact tracing, and why do we do it?
A: Contact tracing is a precise, collaborative process. Working with the Health Department, we review attendance, seating charts, and transportation logs to identify anyone who shared the same airspace as an infected individual. We do this to prevent the spread of illness and keep our school open and safe for everyone.

Q: Why is the monitoring period 21 days?
A: This timeline is based on the biology of the measles virus. **Measles has an incubation period of 7 to 21 days (non infectious period)** meaning symptoms may take up to three weeks to appear after exposure. **Once symptoms appear you are contagious for 4 days**. By monitoring for 21 days, we can catch potential issues early and protect our school community.

Q: If my child is a "close contact" at school, what happens?
A: You will be notified immediately via our secure communication channels. If your child is unvaccinated or partially vaccinated, they may be required to stay home for up to 21 days after their last exposure to prevent potential spread. We will provide you with specific, actionable instructions so you know exactly what the next steps are.

Q: When is the quarantine period longer than 21 days?
A: The standard 21-day quarantine applies when the exposure has ended (e.g., a classmate was contagious for one day). However, if you have **"ongoing exposure,"** the quarantine period will be longer.
Ongoing exposure occurs when an individual lives in the same home as a person with measles and cannot effectively isolate themselves from them. Because you are being re-exposed every day the infected person is contagious, your 21-day quarantine clock does not start until the infected person completes their isolation period and is no longer contagious.

Example of Extended Quarantine:

- **The Scenario:** A student has a sibling who develops measles. The infected sibling is the "index case."
- **The Isolation:** The infected sibling must remain in isolation for at least **4 days** after their rash first appeared.
- **The Timeline:**
    - **Days 1–4:** The healthy student is exposed daily to the sibling. The 21-day countdown cannot start yet.
    - **Day 5:** The sibling is officially non-infectious. The healthy student's 21-day quarantine now begins.
    - **Total Time at Home:** The student would be out of school for the 4 days of the sibling's infectious period + the 21-day quarantine period = **25 days total.**

Q: Should I take precautions when traveling?
A: Yes. Measles cases are rising globally and in various parts of the United States. Before you travel, please check your destination for active measles outbreaks.

- **Verify Vaccination Status:** Ensure your entire family is up-to-date on MMR vaccinations. Ideally, you should be fully vaccinated at least two weeks before your trip.
- **Monitor Upon Return:** Watch your health and your child’s health closely for 21 days after you return from your trip, as this aligns with our school's monitoring window.
- **If You Feel Sick:** If you or your child develop symptoms (fever, rash, cough), please isolate immediately. As always, call your doctor’s office or clinic *before* you arrive so they can prepare a safe, isolated entry for you.

Q: What symptoms should I watch for?

A: Even fully vaccinated individuals should monitor for symptoms during the 21-day watch period. Watch for:

- High fever (often over 101.5°F or 38.6°C)
- Cough, runny nose, or red eyes
- A rash that starts at the hairline and spreads downward

Q: What should I do if my child shows symptoms?
A: Please isolate at home immediately. If your child needs medical evaluation, **you must call your doctor's office or clinic before arriving.** This allows them to prepare a safe, isolated entry to prevent exposing others.

Q: At what age should my child be vaccinated for Measles?
A: First dose: Between **12 and 15 months** of age.
Second dose: Between **4 and 6 years** of age, before starting school.

Indiana Requirements: Indiana requires children in child care and all students from kindergarten through 12th grade to have two appropriately spaced doses of the MMR vaccine. ****The first dose must be administered on or after the child's first birthday to be counted as a valid dose. The second dose can be given earlier than age 4, as long as it is at least 28 days after the first dose.****

Q: How can I protect my infant under one year old, immunocompromised individuals, or unvaccinated family members?
A: Build a "Web" of immunity

- **Vaccinate Household members and Caregivers**: Ensure parents, siblings, relatives, and babysitters have received two doses of the MMR vaccine.
- **Verify Visitor Immunity**: Confirm that any guests interacting with the infant are fully immunized or immune.
- **Travel Exceptions:** If your family is traveling internationally, infants aged 6 to 11 months may get one early dose. However, doses given before a child's first birthday do not count toward the required two-dose childhood series

Q: How can I help prepare?
A: You are a vital partner in this process:

- **Keep Contact Info Current:** Ensure your email and phone number are updated in our system so you don't miss time-sensitive alerts.
- **Check Records Now:** Review your child's immunization status today. If you have questions or need assistance, please reach out to your school nurse *before* an emergency arises.
- **Have a Plan:** Talk to your pediatrician now about what steps to take if you receive an exposure notification.

- **Vaccination Interventions:** Unvaccinated individuals may sometimes receive the MMR vaccine or Immune Globulin (IG) shortly after exposure to mitigate the risk of infection. Please reach out to your health care provider to see if that is an option.
- **Verify Your Immunity:** If you are uncertain about your immunization status, you may opt to receive the MMR vaccine directly rather than undergoing a titer test to confirm existing immunity.