DOCTOR'S CORNER
by Dr. Richard Johnson
Dunbarton



MEASLES NOVEMBER 2026

Seven years ago, I wrote an article on measles… things have gotten worse! In 2019 there were 700 cases reported in the U.S. An AI Overview states that as of late September 2026 the US has reached 3,659 confirmed measles cases surpassing the highest annual total seen in 35 years. In October the CDC documented there were 4,588 cases of measles, more than doubling the total from last year. 95% of infected individuals are unvaccinated or have an unknown vaccination status. Casses have been reported in 47 states including Maine, Vermont and Massachusetts. So far, there have been no 'outbreak' cases in NH. Any NH cases have been linked to international travel. Measles was officially eliminated from the US in 2000 (the vaccine was licensed in 1963) which was a dramatic drop from the early 1960's when there were close to 500,000 cases per year. There once was a time when measles infected nearly every child in the U.S.

Measles is caused by a virus (rubeola virus) that is transmitted from person to person by infected respiratory droplets. It is a highly contagious disease. Symptoms include fever, cough, coryza (inflammation of the nasal cavity and sinuses) and conjunctivitis (the three "Cs"). Dr. Henry Koplik (1858-1927) a NYC pediatrician identified the small white spots inside the cheeks that now bear his name and are pathognomonic (meaning their presence leaves no doubt as to the diagnosis). A rash begins on the face and spreads over the trunk and extremities. A person is considered contagious from 4 days before the rash appears until 4 days after the rash is gone.

The 'at risk' populations are children younger than 5, adults older than 20, pregnant women, and individuals with weakened immune systems from systemic illnesses like leukemia or HIV infection. Severe complications can occur:

1 in 20 children with measles gets pneumonia which is the most common cause of death in children

1 out of 1,000 children with measles will develop encephalitis with potential intellectual disability and/or convulsions

1 to 3 children out of every 1,000 with measles will die from respiratory and neurologic complications.

On 17 October 26 Reuters reported, that after years of success, the vaccination programs in Bangladesh faltered in 2025, and so far in 2026 there have been over 200 thousand cases of measles and over a thousand deaths. 94% of these deaths are in children under five years of age.

Getting the measles vaccine is much "safer" than getting the measles infection. Children should get two doses of the MMR vaccine which protects against measles, mumps and rubella. The first dose is usually given between 12-15 months of age and the second dose at 4-6 years of age. As I understand it, NH law requires immunization against polio, tetanus, hepatitis B, mumps, pertussis, rubella (German measles), rubeola, varicella, diphtheria, and Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b) before entering public school or childcare. There are rare "medical exemptions" when a physician certifies that a specific vaccine would be detrimental to a child's health, and there is a "religious exemption." NH law does not recognize exemptions based on personal, moral or philosophical objections to vaccines. The NH Dept of Health & Human Services, the CDC, The American Academy of Pediatrics and Dartmouth Health all recommend children receive the MMR vaccine. Yet, there are many parents who are skeptical or even fearful of giving their children any vaccine. If you are such a parent, seek out competent medical advice that you can trust and hopefully have your questions answered in a caring and compassionate environment.

Information gleaned from:

www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html

www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html

www.dhhs.nh.gov/programs-services/disease-prevention/nh-immunization-program/immunization-guidance-parents

https://childrens.dartmouth-health.org/kids-health/protecting-your-child-against-rise-measles-cases



