

HEALTH ADVISORY



Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
1 Lower Navy Hill Road, Navy Hill, Saipan, MP 96950



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Protect Yourself and Your Family Against Measles; Vaccinate!”

Measles is emerging again in various outbreaks in the Pacific and in the US mainland. Most recently, Samoa has declared an outbreak of measles with 7 confirmed cases. There are ongoing measles outbreaks in the Philippines, Tonga, New Zealand, and Australia. From January 1-October 3, 2019, there have been 1250 individual cases of measles confirmed in 31 US states.

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) would like to provide the CNMI community with an update regarding measles, and the importance of both children and adults getting immunized.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious disease caused by the measles virus. It occurs worldwide, and is commonly characterized by a full body rash that appears a few days after the onset of the initial fever. Approximately 90% of unvaccinated people who are exposed to the virus will get the measles, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). However, measles can be prevented by getting the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine.

Although the CHCC believes the risk of a measles outbreak in the CNMI is low, these events serve as an important reminder to immunize yourself and your children on schedule. The MMR vaccine requires two doses, given at separate times, in order to be fully effective. The first dose is generally administered when a child is 12-15 months old, and the second dose is given when the child is 4-6 years old. The two doses of the MMR vaccine must be separated by at least 28 days. Adults who do not have two doses of MMR documented should get the MMR vaccine as soon as possible.

Why is immunization coverage important?

Getting the MMR vaccine for yourself and your family will protect them from measles; the MMR vaccine is safe, and has been shown to be up to 97% effective at preventing measles if you get both doses. However, getting immunized also helps with what is known as ‘herd immunity.’ Some people can’t get the MMR vaccine, including babies, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems, such as someone undergoing treatment for cancer. These people rely on everyone around them to get immunized, preventing the virus from entering the community and getting to the most vulnerable populations.

How can I get myself and my children immunized?

The MMR vaccine is available through the Immunization Program, located next to the CHCC dental clinic on the main campus. Walk-ins are welcome. The Immunization clinic can be contacted at (670)236-8745, and is open 7:30AM-4:30PM Monday-Friday.

MMR vaccines are also administered through the Immunization Program's outreach to CNMI schools.

Signs and symptoms of measles

Measles symptoms usually start appearing around 7-14 days after the initial infection. Early symptoms often include:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth (called Koplik spots)
- Rash, which commonly appears 3-5 days after the onset of the initial symptoms. It usually begins as flat red spots that appear on the face and hairline then spread downwards, often covering the entire body.

Although most people recover from measles, the illness can cause complications, especially in babies and young children. Common complications include diarrhea, ear infections, and pneumonia - the most common cause of death from measles in young children.

If you think you or your child may be infected with measles, contact your doctor immediately.

For the safety of other patients, please do not come to the clinic before speaking to a doctor about your concerns; the measles virus infects 9 out of 10 unvaccinated people who come into contact with it, and can stay in the air after an infected person coughs for up to two hours. If you do not have a primary care provider to call, please reach out to our outpatient clinics at (670) 234-8951 during business hours Monday-Saturday, or call the CHCC operator at (670) 234-8950.

For more information about CHCC programs, please follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at www.chcc.gov.mp or call us at (670) 234-8950.

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