

To School Administration, Staff and Parents:

As spring holidays approach, we know that many families have vacations planned, both within and outside of Canada.

Travelling increases your family's risk of exposure to many different diseases, including measles. Measles is a very real threat in many parts of the world, including as close to home as California, where a measles outbreak is currently ongoing.

It is always important to ensure all your immunizations are up to date before you travel.

If you are travelling to an area where a measles outbreak is currently active (including, but not limited to, California), it is very important to ensure all travellers have received the right number of doses, for their age, of the MMR vaccine – the vaccine that protects against measles - before departing on the trip. Children six months to six years old may require an earlier dose of vaccine than provided in the routine schedule, anyone born in or after 1970 should ensure they have had two doses of vaccine, and adults born before 1970 should have one dose.

If you are uncertain whether you and/or your children need the MMR vaccine before travelling, please call your local community health centre to discuss. If you are not sure how to reach your local community health centre, you can also call Health Link Alberta at 1.866.408.5465.

Please remember:

Measles is a serious disease:

In addition to fever, rash and other symptoms, about one in three persons with measles will have one or more complications, including diarrhea, ear infections (which can lead to permanent hearing loss), pneumonia, inflammation of the brain and seizures. Measles can also lead to death. Although complications are more common among children under five years of age, individuals 20 years of age and older and those with compromised immune systems, even healthy people are a risk of complications. In fact, about one in ten people with measles need hospital treatment.

Measles is extremely contagious:

Measles disease is caused by a virus that spreads easily through the air. When someone with measles has been in a room, the virus can survive in the air for up to two hours after the person has left and infect people who simply breathe the air during that time. People who have never been vaccinated or who have never had measles disease are 90 per cent likely to get sick with measles, if exposed to the measles virus.

Measles can be prevented with vaccine:

Two doses of the MMR vaccine, at the appropriate ages and intervals, are required to be protected against measles. One dose of MMR vaccine provides approximately 95% protection. The second dose of MMR vaccine is required for 99% protection. Although everyone's body responds slightly differently to vaccine, we do know that without any vaccine, you are 100% at risk.

Be sure you and your family are protected. For more information on measles disease and the MMR vaccine, please visit www.immunizealberta.ca or call Health Link Alberta at 1.866.408.5465.

Sincerely,

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