

Nurse's Notes: It's Time to Talk About Vaccinations

By Kristin G. Saunders, RN, BSN

What better time to talk about vaccinations than when there is an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease? With this recent measles outbreak, some interesting questions and misinformation have arisen.

Immunizations are one of the greatest accomplishments of modern medicine and are one of the most important preventative health interventions of the 20th century. They have eradicated diseases, continue to prevent medical complications from vaccine preventable diseases and have saved lives. Each year, three million pediatric deaths are prevented by vaccines.

Vaccinating, or not vaccinating, affects the health of children, the child's family, the child's friends, their families, and the community. Vaccinating or not vaccinating affects community immunity or what is also known as herd immunity. This occurs when nearly all individuals are vaccinated which in turn minimizes the risk of illness or the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases to those who do not have the direct benefit of immunization.

Please note that there are only two acceptable exemptions in New York State: medical or religious:

MEDICAL EXEMPTIONS are granted through a New York State licensed physician to individuals who have experienced a prior significant adverse reaction, have an allergy to vaccine component, or are immunocompromised.

RELIGIOUS EXEMPTIONS are defined by the New York State Department of Health as: *if a parent(s) or guardian(s) of a child holds genuine and sincere religious beliefs which are contrary to school entry immunization requirements, the immunization requirements are not required for the child to attend school.*



Child care providers and school districts reserve the right to ask for further documentation. Additionally, they may need to meet with the parents and their religious official to discuss the religious exemption request. Ultimately, the child care provider and/or school district reserves the right to accept or deny a religious exemption.

According to Healthy People 2020, in order for herd immunity to be effective, at least 90% of the community would need to be vaccinated in order to protect those who are not vaccinated. However, with diseases such as pertussis and measles, a population immunization rate would need to be greater than 95% in order to achieve community immunity (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

According to the 2016-2017 New York State School Immunization Survey, in Rockland County, children younger than 12 months old were 71% completely immunized. MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine is not administered until the appropriate recommended age of 12 months – 15 months. This is where community immunity plays a large role for children of this age. Children 12 months of age and older were 84% completed immunized with 92% being vaccinated against MMR.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT CONTRACTING THE MEASLES DURING THIS OUTBREAK, it is highly recommended that you speak with your health care provider to find out if you and your children are protected against the measles, as well as any other vaccine preventable disease. Your health care provider can also direct you to reliable and trusted sources for further information regarding vaccines. Depending upon the circumstances, your health care provider may decide to run a blood test for you



immunization titers against certain diseases. A titer test measures the antibodies in order to check for disease immunity. The results of this test will show whether one is immune to measles or any other vaccine preventable disease and if further vaccinations are needed.

Please remember that the first recommended dose of MMR is between the ages of 12 months to 15 months. During this recent outbreak, the NYS Department of Health has recommended that children between six months and 11 months receive a MMR shot. However, this dose will not count towards the 2 MMR doses for school entry requirement.

In regards to excluding children who do not have their age appropriate MMR's during this outbreak, there are a few things to keep in mind. The Rockland County Department of Health was the agency that decided which schools needed to enforce exclusions based on measles exposure and/or actual diagnosis of measles within the population of children who attend that school. The 21-day exclusion criterion comes into play based on when a child was exposed to measles and when other children

were exposed to the original child. This is why it is important to speak to parents that have children who may have a medical or religious exemption when enrolled, to ensure that they have back-up child care for an extended period of time. It is also important that the parent(s)/guardian(s) understand that if there is a case of a vaccine preventable disease within the program, the children who are not fully vaccinated against the particular disease or have an exemption will not be allowed to attend the program based upon the time period that is declared by the Department of Health. This may vary based upon the disease.

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS, please remember that if a child in your program is diagnosed with measles, you are required to report the diagnosis to the Rockland County Department of Health at 845-364-2663. You also are required to inform your registrar/licensor within 24 hours of the report. Please refer to your health care plan to see if there are any further steps you need to take.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kristin G. Saunders, RN, BSN at 845-425-0009 x493 or kristins@rocklandchildcare.org.



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