

Measles Information for Newtown School Community

As you are probably aware, the country has been experiencing a large measles outbreak over the past few weeks. In January 2015 there were 102 cases of measles reported. The outbreak is thought to have originated in Disneyland where a visitor (possibly from a country where measles are still commonplace) came into contact with other susceptible people. Last year there were 644 cases of measles reported in 27 states. This is the largest number of cases since 2000, when the United States declared that measles had been eliminated from this country. The CDC attributes the recent rise in cases in the US to the rise in measles cases in countries that Americans frequently travel to (England, France, Germany, India, the Philippines and Vietnam) and also to the spread of measles in communities with pockets of unvaccinated people.

Many Americans today, including most of Newtown's parents and students, are too young to remember when measles was commonplace. Their grandparents, however, can probably remember someone who had this disease and suffered disability or even death as a result. According to the CDC, prior to 1963, 3 to 4 million people a year got the measles in the United States. Of those, 400 to 500 died, 48,000 were hospitalized and 4000 developed encephalitis (swelling of the brain) from measles (<http://www.cdc.gov/measles/about/faqs.html#measles-elimination>) **Parents are strongly encouraged to immunize their children to protect them from serious disease and to protect the most vulnerable children in our school system and the community as a whole.** Parents of children who are not fully immunized, are required to have a medical or religious exemption form on file before their child enters school. All exemption forms state: *"Children with religious or medical exemptions shall be permitted to attend a licensed child care program or school except in the case of an outbreak of vaccine-preventable disease. In the event of an outbreak of vaccine preventable disease, all susceptible children will be excluded from child care or school settings based on public health officials' determination that the child care facility or school is a significant site for disease exposure, transmission and spread into the community. Children without proof of immunity, including children with religious and medical exemptions shall be excluded from these settings for this reason and will not be able to return until (1) the danger of the outbreak has passed as determined by public health officials, (2) the child becomes ill with the disease and completely recovers, or (3) the child is immunized."* (Please note, per CDC, exclusion may be up to 21 days after last case identified)