

PREPARING AND RESPONDING TO MEASLES: Checklist for Institutions of Higher Education



WHY SHOULD INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PREPARE FOR MEASLES?

Measles is caused by a highly contagious virus that spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. If one person has measles, up to 9 out of 10 people nearby will become infected if they are not protected.

Measles can spread quickly in Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) because students, faculty, and staff spend a lot of time in close contact with each other.

Measles is more than just a rash – it can cause serious health complications or even death. Up to 1 in 5 people who get measles will be hospitalized. The best protection is the **measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine**.

The risk for widespread measles in the U.S. remains low. However, measles cases occur in the U.S. every year when unvaccinated travelers get measles while they are in other countries. Outbreaks also occur when measles spreads in under-vaccinated communities. Anyone who is not protected against measles is at risk.

PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE MEASLES CASES

- **Know how to contact your health department when measles is suspected.** Ideally, have a point of contact ahead of time and discuss plans for how to respond to a measles case.
 - » your health department and local vaccination providers, such as pharmacies or clinics, to set up vaccination clinics on campus and help make **MMR vaccination** accessible for those who wish to receive it.
- **Review health department guidance and applicable state or local laws and regulations on measles.** Update existing emergency operations plans and incident command system structures for measles outbreaks. Be prepared to activate these plans, especially when exclusions, housing relocation, or large-scale communications are required.
- **Communicate with staff, students, and faculty** about your institution's policies and procedures:
 - » **Campus policies** for people to stay at home/their residence hall when they are sick.
 - » **Consider proactively sharing information** about **signs and symptoms of measles** so students, faculty, and staff know when to stay home and when to seek medical evaluation.
 - » **Procedures for students and staff with measles symptoms**, such as being required to use a **mask** when possible, isolate away from others, and how to receive medical evaluation and care before returning to the classroom/congregate living spaces or participating in group activities.
 - » **MMR vaccination clinics.** The best way to prevent the spread of measles is to ensure that all students and staff are vaccinated or **immune to measles**. If needed, partner with
- **Identify a temporary isolation space** where a student with measles symptoms can await transportation for outside medical evaluation, if needed. This will help prevent other people from getting sick.
 - » Choose a separate room (not shared with anyone else) with a door that can close and a window that can open, ideally with access to a separate bathroom, if available. If there is no separate room available, consider identifying an outdoor space to use, weather and safety permitting.
- **Make sure your institution has a supply of masks to give to a person with measles symptoms.**
- **Develop a plan for isolating people with measles until recovery:**
 - » **Advise students to return home for isolation if possible, using private transportation.** To prevent others from getting sick, students with measles should not travel on airplanes, buses, or other forms of public transportation.

- » **If students cannot return home for isolation,** coordinate with Residence Life to identify isolation space:
 - The space should have a solid door that closes and, ideally, a dedicated bathroom. If possible, choose a space with a window and **directional airflow**, meaning that air exhausts from the room to the outdoors and not to other parts of the building. HEPA filtration can be used to create directional airflow in temporary isolation rooms. A person isolated in a space without directional airflow should continue to wear a mask as much as possible to prevent other people from getting sick.
 - Make plans for how the students' needs will be met while in isolation (e.g., healthcare, food delivery, other necessities, well-being checks).
 - Only people with confirmed measles infection should be housed together in the same isolation space. People with measles symptoms who are awaiting test results should be housed in individual isolation spaces.
- **Make a plan for how to continue education** for students who may need to stay out of classes due to measles isolation or quarantine. The health department can provide guidance for isolation and quarantine duration, if needed.
- **Maintain and ensure timely access to documentation of measles immunity status for all students** including any with medical or other exemptions from vaccination. Communicate to faculty and staff the importance of obtaining documentation of measles immunity if born after 1957. See **sample documentation template**.
 - » This information will help the campus and health department identify and communicate with people who are not immune to measles, so that they can be offered vaccination or other **post-exposure prophylaxis** (PEP) to prevent infection and serious illness after exposure.
 - » Ensure record keeping is consistent with any state and local legal requirements and considers privacy and confidentiality.
- **If the IHE has student health services on campus:**
 - » **Provide training to campus healthcare providers** on measles signs and symptoms, **infection control procedures**, and testing protocols for measles.
 - » **Student health services should follow established infection control procedures for patients with suspected measles.**
 - » **Make sure there are processes in place to evaluate and test people who may have measles.** Student health services can coordinate with the department of health for guidance on testing procedures and supplies.

Responding to Measles in Institutions of Higher Education



IMMEDIATE ACTIONS— WHAT TO DO IN THE FIRST 10 MINUTES AFTER MEASLES IS SUSPECTED

When a student, faculty, or staff member has measles symptoms, take these actions IMMEDIATELY:

- ❑ **Give the person a mask.** To limit the spread of respiratory secretions, masks should be well-fitting and cover their mouth and nose.
- ❑ **Isolate the person with measles symptoms to protect others from exposure.**
 - » Move the **person with measles symptoms** to the designated temporary isolation space. Help coordinate medical care, as needed.
 - Healthcare workers in student health services should follow CDC **infection control procedures** for measles.
 - » After the person leaves the isolation space, it should remain vacant for two hours. Then, clean and disinfect the space with an **EPA-registered disinfectant** suitable for hepatitis B virus and HIV (these are also effective against the measles virus).
 - » Staff who are monitoring an isolated person and staff who are cleaning an isolation space after use should have documented **evidence of immunity** to measles and should wear a well-fitting **respirator** (preferred) or **disposable mask**.
- ❑ **Contact your state or local health department.** They will have further guidance for isolation duration, testing, care, and transport, if needed, as well as guidance for other students, faculty, and staff. The health department might offer people without evidence of immunity who were exposed MMR vaccination or other **post-exposure prophylaxis** (PEP) to prevent infection and may recommend quarantine. They can also help coordinate on-campus testing and vaccination clinics, if needed.
- ❑ **Seek emergency care** if the person who is sick gets rapidly worse or if they experience trouble breathing, pain when breathing or coughing, dehydration, a fever or headache that won't stop, confusion, decreased alertness or severe weakness, blue color around the mouth, or low energy. **Notify staff at the healthcare facility of your concern for measles before arrival so that they can put procedures in place to prevent spread.**

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS AFTER ISOLATION

Be prepared to work with your health department on the following actions, based on their recommendations:

- **Make a list of people who might have been exposed to the person with suspected measles.** Consider movement throughout the campus including classes, sporting events, clubs, special events, dining halls, campus employment, and housing. The health department might recommend that students, faculty, or staff who are not **immune to measles** be excluded from campus to protect their health and prevent further spread. The health department might also offer them vaccination or other **post-exposure prophylaxis** (PEP) to prevent infection and serious illness after exposure.
- **Students with measles should consider returning home via private vehicle for the isolation period whenever possible.** They should not take public transportation (buses, trains, airplanes) to return home. Only people with evidence of measles immunity should transport an ill student home, if needed, and should wear a well-fitting **respirator** (preferred) or a **disposable mask**. To limit the spread of respiratory secretions, ill students should wear a well-fitting mask that covers their mouth and nose.
- **Inform students, faculty, and staff** that someone at the IHE has had measles symptoms. Ask them to watch for measles symptoms for 21 days (even if they are immune) and seek medical care if symptoms develop. Early symptoms can seem like a common cold and include fever; cough; runny nose; red, watery eyes; and/or tiny white spots inside the mouth. A rash generally occurs 3–5 days after symptoms begin and usually appears on the face and behind the ears first and then spreads down the body. See **sample notification templates**. Educate students, faculty, and staff that **MMR vaccination** is the best protection against measles.

RESOURCES

About Measles

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/about/index.html>

Be Ready Toolkit

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/php/toolkit/index.html>

Measles Isn't Just a Little Rash Fact Sheet

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/resources/measles-isnt-just-a-little-rash-infographic.html>

Preventing Measles Before and After Travel Fact Sheet

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/resources/before-after-travel-fact-sheet.html>

Measles Outbreaks on College Campuses - ACHA

<https://www.acha.org/news/measles-outbreaks-on-college-campuses/>