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Measles is Only a Plane Ride Away: Catch Up On Vaccinations Before Summer Vacation and Travel Begins

SOUTH CENTRAL IDAHO – With the recent rise in measles cases across the US and popular overseas travel hot spots like the UK and the European Union, local health officials are urging families to check their immunization records and make sure they are up to date.

“Measles can be incredibly contagious to unvaccinated populations, and it’s only a plane ride away,” said Tanis Maxwell, SCPHD Epidemiology Program Manager. “Up to 9 out of 10 unvaccinated individuals who are exposed to measles will catch it, and this can lead to serious health complications like pneumonia and brain swelling. In some cases, measles can even be fatal.”

As families prepare for summer vacations, vaccines should be planned out several weeks before the travel date to give their immune systems a chance to learn from the vaccine and build up protection against disease. The MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine is the primary prevention tool against measles, and should be administered at least 2 weeks prior to travel. One dose of the MMR vaccine provides 93% protection against measles, mumps, and rubella. Two doses of the MMR vaccine provide 97% protection and both doses should be scheduled 28 days apart for most children and adults.

“We’ve seen a few diseases come back because of low vaccine rates in other areas,” said Maxwell. “Measles, pertussis (whooping cough), and pneumococcal infections are just a few examples of diseases that have re-emerged recently. Traveling exposes you and your family to more risk, but that risk can be lowered by vaccines.”

Scheduling vaccines now can also help parents get ahead of fall requirements for school. Children are required to have several immunizations before entering kindergarten, seventh grade, and senior year in high school. Additionally, most colleges and universities require future students to receive immunizations before enrolling, especially if they plan to enter a healthcare program.

As an adult, general vaccines can range from about 50 dollars to more than 300 dollars a dose. **For children 18 years and younger, the cost is covered at all Idaho's Vaccines for Children (VFC) providers, including the health district.** This leaves only a small administration fee for insurance to cover or families to pay. No child will ever be denied a vaccine at a VFC provider if the family is uninsured or unable to pay.

If you cannot find your immunization records, SCPHD can help. Reach out to scphd@phd5.id.gov for assistance or call the main office line: 208-737-5900.

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