



How to Prepare and Respond if Childhood Measles Cases Occur in Your Area: Resources, Legal Responsibilities, and Guidance for Religious School Principals

The Problem

From January to April 2019, there were 555 cases of measles among children and adults in 20 states. This is the second-greatest number of cases reported in the U.S. since measles was eliminated in 2000. Keep up to date on the number of measles outbreaks at <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html>.

Measles is highly infectious (meaning the airborne virus spreads easily and quickly, infecting a large proportion of people who are directly exposed). It is nearly 100% preventable, and it can be very serious, even deadly. Consequently, its occurrence is cause for concern, especially in settings that have many children in a room over several hours.

Q. Why is this important now?

A. It's alarming and serious when cases affecting children are concentrated in place and time. And, of course, whenever we can prevent unnecessary suffering we are obligated to do so.

Q. What do I need to know now?

There are issues for which you'll want answers, and for which you'll need to plan:

1. Learn about formal, legal obligations that apply to you and to your senior staff as on-site leaders of your school, and that apply to your organization. These obligations are triggered when people with symptoms or those with diagnosed measles come to your school setting and/or synagogue. In most states, you personally and your religious school as an entity are considered to be "mandated reporters."

[As an example of a State's Communicable Disease Code—the laws and regulations that include you among the mandated reporting entities and individuals during certain outbreaks—see that of New York, at

<https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/diseases/reporting/communicable/>

2. What are you mandated to report and to whom?

Before a measles outbreak, you should familiarize yourself with the outward symptoms of early measles (see: <http://www.cdc.gov/measles/about/signs-symptoms.html>). During an outbreak, you are not expected to become a medical professional nor to clinically assess people to determine whether they are infected (I heard your Board sigh in relief, having anticipated the potential liability.) Nor are you to have students inspected by a clinician whom you hire or who volunteers.



3. What would you do with this information?

You might learn that the sibling of a student has or is presumed to have measles because of a known exposure to a known case (e.g., if a public school has been reported in the media to have cases). In this case you'd not speak directly to the student or parent—or anyone else, in order to preserve dignity and confidentiality—but you'd immediately call the Communicable Disease section of your Local Health Department, your county or municipality's designated health authority. You might see in one of your students a persistent cough and profusely runny nose and red-rimmed eyes, and notice his/her uncharacteristic lethargy. Call the student's parent and then call the local health department.

That's what "mandated reporters" do; they provide information to public health agencies that can be acted upon quickly. This is positive both for the exposed person and the community at large.

Here's why. The usual way that cases of what are called "notifiable diseases" are made known to the health department for follow-up is through reporting by physicians and laboratories after the person has been seen in a medical setting. For some infections, transmission occurs too quickly and/or has a high risk of causing significant illness or death to be left to the end of the shift/day/week to report. Rapid reporting by mandated reporters of possible instances of such infections allows the public health department to confirm cases efficiently, discern patterns early, and develop appropriate control measures. Although this action on your part is 'behind the scenes,' be assured it's vital to community well-being.

Q. What should I do now, before measles is present in my community?

A. Get to know the folks at your local health department, either as an individual school or in concert with other Jewish institutions, perhaps you could volunteer for a community-based committee, or co-sponsor an event. We know that relationships are everything.

Q. What if I live in an area where cases have already been confirmed?

A. You will not be officially in charge of informing the community about measles, nor for educating parents on the value on immunization. Nevertheless you might want to have some authoritative resources at the ready.



Resources:

Vaccine Resources to Share with Parents:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/conversations/resources-parents.html>

For Parents: Vaccines for Your Children

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/index.html>

Current MMR Vaccine Recommendations

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/mmr.html>

If You Choose Not to Vaccinate Your Child, Understand the Risks and Responsibilities

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/conversations/downloads/not-vacc-risks-bw-office.pdf>

Here's how to find your local health department:

Directory of Local Health Departments

<https://www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory>