

Measles Fact Sheet:

Protecting Our Farms and Families: *A Call to Action for Farm Owners*

The Current Risk: Why We Must Act Now

An active situation was identified involving three confirmed cases of adult measles discovered on a busload of H2A farm workers traveling through multiple states (California, Oregon, and Washington). This incident presents an extremely high risk for multi-state transmission and immediate potential disruption to agricultural operations and local labor pools.

Protecting the health of the agricultural workforce is critical for the health of our local community and the economic survival of our farms. A single case can lead to harvest delays, quarantine-induced labor shortages, and significant financial loss.

For farm owners, the risk is clear: measles can immobilize an entire crew, halting production at critical moments. Proactive awareness is a valuable tool to prevent any impact on operations, because this virus moves with unparalleled speed through unvaccinated populations.

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The Invisible Threat: Understanding Contagion

In the shared environments of a farm—whether in the fields, packing houses, or shared housing—understanding transmission is key to maintaining a safe working environment. Measles is airborne and highly resilient, meaning a single infected individual can compromise an entire workforce before they even appear ill.

STRATEGIC INSIGHT FOR MANAGERS

Because workers are contagious for four days before a rash appears, by the time a manager identifies a visible symptom, the entire crew has likely been exposed for nearly a week. This makes the virus nearly impossible to contain through observation alone.

The following facts illustrate the mechanical threat of the virus:



Airborne Spread

The virus is spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes.



Persistence

The virus remains infectious in the air and on surfaces for up to 2 hours after an infected person has left the area.



90% Infection Rate

If an individual is not immune and is in close proximity to an infected person, there is a 90% chance they will become infected.



Transmission Window

An infected person is contagious starting 4 days before their rash appears until 4 days after the rash is visible.

Signs and Symptoms: A Timeline for Detection

Early detection is required to prevent a single case from escalating into a farm-wide outbreak.

EARLY WARNING PHASE (DAYS 7–14 POST-INFECTION)

The illness begins with symptoms that may be mistaken for a severe cold:

- High fever (often spiking to 104°F or higher)
- Persistent cough
- Runny nose (coryza)
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)

INTERNAL INDICATORS (DAYS 2–3 AFTER FIRST SYMPTOMS)

- **Koplik spots:** Small white spots that appear inside the mouth. These are a unique early indicator that the “Measles Rash” is imminent.

THE MEASLES RASH (DAYS 3–5 AFTER FIRST SYMPTOMS)

The rash follows a predictable downward path:

- **Start:** Flat red spots appear on the face at the hairline.
- **Spread:** The rash moves down the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and finally the feet.
- **Texture:** Small, raised bumps may develop on top of the flat red spots.

High-Risk Groups

Four specific groups face the greatest danger of severe complications:

1. Children younger than 5 years old.
2. Adults older than 20 years old.
3. Pregnant women (risk of premature birth or low-birth-weight babies).
4. Immunocompromised individuals (those with weakened immune systems).

Prevention and Immediate Action

Proactive vaccination is the only effective defense. Once the virus enters a workforce, hygiene and social distancing are rarely enough to stop its spread.

- **Primary Action:** Ensure all workers have received the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine. This is the single most effective way to protect you, your family, your coworkers, and your livelihood.
- **Suspected Exposure:** If symptoms appear or exposure is suspected, seek medical care immediately.
- **MANDATORY PROTOCOL:** Call the healthcare provider first before arriving at a clinic. This prevents the virus from spreading to others in the waiting room and protects the local healthcare infrastructure.

STRATEGIC INSIGHT THE INCUBATION DELAY

Symptoms do not appear immediately. There is a 7 to 14-day delay between exposure and the first sign of illness. If a worker is diagnosed today, your crew was exposed 1 to 2 weeks ago. This delay is critical for accurate contact tracing and labor planning.

More Than a Rash: Evaluating Severe Complications

Measles is a major medical event, not a minor illness. For the agricultural community, the statistical reality of complications represents a serious threat to long-term workforce health.

COMPLICATION	IMPACT AND FREQUENCY
Hospitalization	1 in 5 unvaccinated individuals will require hospital care.
Pneumonia	Affects 1 in 20 children; it is the primary cause of measles-related death.
Encephalitis	1 in 1,000 experience brain swelling, which can cause deafness or permanent brain damage.
Mortality	1 to 3 per 1,000 infected children will die from respiratory or neurologic complications.

Choosing vaccination is a commitment to the future of your family and the productivity of your farm. By acting now, you ensure that our agricultural community remains healthy, operational, and strong.

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Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html>