

Measles Fact Sheet:

Protecting Your Health and Livelihood... *A Guide for Farmworkers*

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 possible exposure in your local labor pools.

Protecting your health is the most important step for you, your co-workers, and your ability to earn a living. Measles is a serious illness that can put you out of work for weeks. Because farmworkers often live and work closely together, a single case can spread quickly, causing many people to get sick at once.

The risk is clear: measles can make you very ill, potentially leading to lost wages and high medical costs. Proactive awareness is a valuable tool to protect your personal health and livelihood, as this virus spreads quickly. It is so contagious that if one person has it, 9 out of every 10 people exposed will become infected if they are not protected.

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The Invisible Threat: Understanding Contagion

In the shared environments of the farm—whether in the fields, packing houses, or shared housing—understanding how measles spreads is key to protecting yourself and your coworkers. Measles is airborne and highly resilient, meaning you can be exposed to the virus even before the infected person appears sick.

The following facts illustrate the 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

You need to know the signs to protect yourself and your coworkers from an 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 coming soon.

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.

More Than a Rash: Evaluating Severe Complications

Measles is a major medical event, not a minor illness. The risk of severe complications is a serious threat to your long-term 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.

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).

Getting vaccinated is a commitment to your health and the health of your co-workers. By acting now, you are protecting your ability to work and supporting a healthy community.

Prevention and Immediate Action

- **Primary Action:** Getting the **MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella)** vaccine is the single most effective way to protect your body and your ability to keep working.
- **Suspected Exposure:** If symptoms appear or exposure is suspected, **seek medical care immediately.**
- **MANDATORY PROTOCOL:** You must **call the doctor or clinic first** before arriving. This prevents the virus from spreading to others in the waiting room and protects the local health services.