

News Release

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Measles & pertussis showing up in Southwest Utah

SOUTHWEST UTAH – The Southwest Utah Public Health Department (SWUPHD) is alerting our residents that unusually high cases of measles and pertussis have been confirmed recently in our district, which covers Washington, Iron, Kane, Beaver, and Garfield counties.

“Measles is extremely contagious,” says Dr. David Blodgett, SWUPHD Director and Health Officer. “Since we are only aware of cases from positive lab tests, it is likely that there are more infections and exposures in our community that we don’t know about. If you are unvaccinated then you are at risk of getting the disease if you are exposed, which can happen up to two hours after an infected person has left an indoor space that you enter.”

“We are also concerned about a rise in pertussis cases,” Dr. Blodgett continues. “Also known as whooping cough or the ‘hundred-day cough’, this disease is also very contagious and can cause severe complications for infants and children. We urge parents to make sure their kids are up to date on their immunizations. These illnesses used to take a heavy toll on children before vaccine science was developed and we don’t want them to make a comeback.”

All known cases of measles and pertussis in Southwest Utah are investigated by SWUPHD surveillance staff with efforts made to alert close contacts and reduce the spread in the community. Both diseases are vaccine-preventable; all recent confirmed cases of measles and most pertussis cases were in unvaccinated individuals. All 4 known measles cases and 2 pertussis cases live in Iron County, while 30 pertussis cases are in Washington County with one child hospitalized.

Measles, one of the most contagious infections, is an airborne virus that causes a high fever, cough, and runny nose, followed by white spots in the mouth, then a red rash that can cover the entire body. Symptoms start a week or two after exposure. While most cases will recover at home, measles can cause severe diarrhea, breathing problems, brain swelling, blindness, and even death. Over 100,000 people, mostly unimmunized children, die from measles worldwide every year. The United States has seen the most cases this year since measles was officially eliminated in 2000.

To find out how protected you are by vaccination according to your age, visit swuhealth.gov/measles. If you suspect that you or a family member has measles, call your healthcare provider for instructions before going in person.

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a bacterial infection. Common cold-like symptoms start 1-3 weeks after exposure, but coughing fits can follow that last up to 10 weeks. These fits can be followed by a “whooping” sound as the person inhales and can result in vomiting, fatigue, sleep loss, and fractured ribs. Infants in their first year are at higher risk of complications and may have difficulty breathing instead of coughing. Pertussis vaccines work most of the time, and vaccinated people who still get sick will have symptoms that are generally milder.

Contact your healthcare provider to find out your vaccination status and get the shots you need, or make an appointment at your nearest SWUPHD clinic by visiting swuhealth.gov/immunizations.

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The mission of the Southwest Utah Public Health Department is to protect the community's health through the promotion of wellness and the prevention of disease. Visit our website at www.swuhealth.gov.