

# UW Health: Madison area health systems encourage measles vaccinations

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MADISON, Wis. – Following recent confirmed measles cases in Wisconsin, including several [community exposures](#) in Dane County, SSM Health, UnityPoint Health – Meriter, UW Health, and Public Health Madison & Dane County are urging all community members to ensure they are vaccinated against measles.

All individuals eligible for vaccination should confirm their vaccination status by reviewing their records or by receiving the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, commonly called the MMR vaccine.

One dose protects about 93% of people, while two doses of the vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles, and the vaccination often lasts a lifetime, according to Dr. Jim Conway, medical director of the immunization program at UW Health.

“Many adults never had these vaccines as children and should strongly consider getting immunized if they are unsure,” said Conway, who is also a professor of pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. “Check the Wisconsin Immunization Registry, or contact your health care provider, to find out if you’ve received the MMR vaccine. If you haven’t, or you need a booster, contact your provider or your local pharmacy to get the shot.”

Measles is a highly contagious viral infection that continues to circulate around the world. Cases have been increasing across North America recently, largely due to decreasing immunization rates in children, after the disease was considered eliminated for decades.

It spreads through the air—when an infected person coughs or breathes—and can linger for up to two hours. It is so contagious that approximately nine in 10 unvaccinated individuals exposed to the virus can be expected to develop infection.

While most people with measles experience high fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes and eventually a diffuse rash, it can lead to more serious issues like pneumonia, brain swelling and even death. Complications are more common in younger and older individuals, as well as those with compromised immune systems.

“It only takes one person with the virus to set off an outbreak,” said Katelyn Harms, an infection preventionist at UnityPoint Health – Meriter. “If you’re showing signs of illness, it’s important to stay home and avoid spreading the virus, particularly to children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. If you need medical attention, call the emergency department in advance to let them know you could have measles, so they can prepare.”

The MMR vaccine is recommended for almost everyone, with the first dose typically administered at age 12 to 15 months and a second dose at 4 to 6 years old. Adults who have not received the vaccine or are unsure of their status, pregnant women and individuals with weakened immune systems should discuss vaccination with their health care provider.

“Vaccination is not only about protecting yourself, it’s also about protecting your neighbors, coworkers and loved ones,” said Dr. Amanda Carlson, associate medical director of infectious disease at SSM Health. “When more people are vaccinated, we create immunity for our community that helps prevent outbreaks.”

SSM Health, UnityPoint Health – Meriter and UW Health, as well as most local pharmacies, all offer the MMR vaccine. Appointments are preferred but not required at many locations and can be made by calling the clinic or via MyChart. To schedule an appointment at the [UW Health John Wall Drive Thru Clinic](#), call (608) 422-8100.