

# Salt Lake-area measles cases shake up Top of Utah parents

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CLEARFIELD -- Four confirmed cases and six suspected cases of measles -- a highly contagious disease that can be spread quickly among teens -- in Salt Lake County have the attention of Davis and Weber-Morgan county health officials.

"Salt Lake (City) is not that far away," Michelle Singleton, Weber- Morgan Health Department immunization program manager, said referring to the proximity of Ogden to Olympus High School in Salt Lake City, where the cases were first reported.

The cases, believed to have spread to Utah from out of the country, are the first confirmed cases of measles to have been reported in the state since 2005.

Health officials are encouraging parents who haven't yet immunized their children against mumps, measles and rubella to do so.

"That is the best protection we have to offer," Singleton said.

Making these particular cases more challenging is that those involved are teenagers who have a tendency, because of school, work and extracurricular activities, to be more transitory in nature, Singleton said.

"It's not like a toddler who stays home with mom. Teenagers are more mobile," she said.

Since reports of the measles were aired by the media, the phones at the Davis and Weber-Morgan county health departments have been ringing more frequently, as officials field calls from concerned parents wanting to know their children's immunization status.

"We have not been overwhelmed, but we have been busy," said Davis County Health Director Lewis R. Garrett.

No recent cases of measles have been confirmed in the Top of Utah.

However, Garrett said, Davis County did have a suspected case of measles it has since ruled out.

"We have had a couple of scares, but they have turned out to be something else," he said.

Davis County has had exposure to the four confirmed cases in Salt Lake City, Garrett said, and as a result, health officials have had to contact those people involved and verify their immunization and, in some instances, provide them with the needed immunization.

"There definitely could be a second wave," Garrett said.

"Measles is hard to contain and control," agreed Singleton, adding that sometimes those calling the health department are parents who have taken an immunization exemption in the past and have changed their mind as a result of the measles scare.

Some parents will use the exemption because they lack or do not want to take the time to track the immunization record of their child, she said.

The concern that autism may be related to childhood vaccinations has also caused some parents concern, although health officials say there is nothing to substantiate those concerns.

That claim originated in England about a decade ago and has since been pretty well debunked,

Garrett said.

There are also cost concerns, Garrett said.

"Vaccines required without adequate insurance can result in an expense," he said.

If the county encounters a confirmed case of measles, he said, those children who are not immunized will be excluded from school for the 21-day incubation period, which may affect their grades.

However, despite all of the reasons parents take a personal exemption to having their children immunized, the child immunization rates in Davis and Weber-Morgan counties remain at 93-plus percent and 91.5 percent, respectively.

"For those that do have their immunizations, it is comforting," Singleton said.

Vaccines for Children, offered through health departments, provides vaccinations to the uninsured or underinsured for \$10. The charge can be waived if someone does not have the money to pay for it.

"(Cost) should never be an obstacle," Singleton said.

The first MMR vaccine is recommended for children when they are between 12 and 15 months old, with each child to have a second dose of the MMR vaccine sometime between the ages of 4 years and 6 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Fewer than one in 1,000 cases of measles end in death, Garrett said. But for 30 percent of those who contract the disease, it does involve serious complications. "It is nothing to take lightly."