

FACTS ABOUT MEASLES EXCLUSIONS

What are exclusions? Why are exclusions necessary? What purpose do they serve?

- Exclusions are a public health tool that both protect individuals who are susceptible for a getting a disease as well as the larger community where they live and engage with others. Susceptible individuals are removed from the school where an ongoing exposure risk exists. They would then restrict their activities to home while waiting to see if they develop symptoms of the disease they were exposed to. This helps protect others in the school and the larger community who may be susceptible. It is analogous to what firefighters do with a large wildfire – they create fire breaks to contain the fire. A fire break removes the fuel for the fire to expand. Exclusion is the public health equivalent to the fire break – individuals are excluded to protect them from getting measles and to minimize the risk of them spreading it to others if they get sick.
- Exclusions are for students, staff, and volunteers who are ill as well as for those who are likely to become ill if exposed to the disease.
- Per the WAC (Washington Administrative Code) below, exclusions are one of the actions the health officer may choose to implement to stop an outbreak from spreading.
- For measles, exclusions help protect those who are unvaccinated, protect those who are too young to be vaccinated, protect pregnant women who cannot be vaccinated, and prevent spread of disease.

What is the legal authority of the Health Officer regarding exclusions?

- The legal authority of the health officer is described in [WAC 246-110-020 Control of contagious disease](#).
- When there is an outbreak of a contagious disease, as defined in WAC 246-110-010, and there is the potential for a case or cases within a school or childcare center, the local health officer, after consultation with the secretary of health or designee if appropriate, shall take all appropriate actions deemed to be necessary to control or eliminate the spread of the disease within their local health jurisdiction including, but not limited to:
 - (a) Closing part or all of the affected school(s) or childcare center(s);
 - (b) Closing other schools or childcare centers;
 - (c) Canceling activities or functions at schools or childcare centers;

How can my family appeal an exclusion?

- You have the right to petition the superior court for release from isolation or quarantine in accordance with [WAC 246-100-055](#). You have the right to legal counsel. If you are unable to afford legal counsel, then counsel will be appointed for you at government expense and you should request the appointment of counsel at this time. If you currently have legal counsel, then you have an opportunity to contact that counsel for assistance.

Why are children not excluded for other vaccine-preventable diseases like the flu?

- People with influenza are sent home from school during the time when they have fever and would be infectious to others. This is the same for any infectious disease, including measles. Individuals actively sick and contagious to others are sent home from school until they are no longer contagious and feel better.
- Exclusion happens when we send people home who have been exposed to a disease like measles but are not yet sick or showing symptoms.
- For seasonal influenza we do not use exclusion as a disease control measure. Here are some reasons why measles is different from the flu:

- Measles vaccine is a required vaccine in schools and is very effective at preventing measles (97% with two doses) while influenza vaccine is recommended but not required in school age children and vaccine effectiveness is usually lower (50-60%).
- With a measles outbreak, measles would be confined to a small number of people in our community at any given point in time. In contrast, during flu season, hundreds or thousands of people across the community are infectious at any given time, depending on the point of time in flu season.
- With a measles outbreak, the primary risk to young people acquiring measles is through contact with measles within schools compared to the community. During flu season, flu is everywhere – schools, daycares, workplaces, and public transportation.

Why are schools not being closed to stop an outbreak?

- School closures are a control measure that could be considered if necessary. Schools may be closed for control of infectious disease in a few circumstances:
 - If absenteeism due to illness in students is high (usually greater than 20-25% overall); and/or
 - If absenteeism in staff is high enough to not be able to conduct normal school services; and/or
 - In the early stages of a pandemic or widespread community outbreak to try to minimize community transmission of disease. Schools, as well as public events, are activities where people have close contact with dozens or hundreds of people during the day, resulting in the potential for widespread transmission of an infectious disease.
- School closure may not be appropriate for measles because:
 - There would typically only be a small number of students who have measles in any given school.
 - There is only a small number of students who may be excluded because they do not have evidence of immunity (this may be only 1-3% of the student population).
 - For school closure to be effective as a control measure, a school would have to close for at least one incubation period, which is 21 days for measles. Closing the school for 21 days would be too disruptive to the entire student population compared to the benefit of school closure.
 - The outbreak can be controlled by keeping sick children from school while they are infectious and by excluding those at high risk of getting measles.

Why can students immediately go back to school once they get an MMR for a mumps outbreak but not measles?

- Measles is one of the most contagious diseases known. It is an airborne virus that can cause infection in a susceptible person even if they walk into a room up to two hours after a contagious person had been there. It is also a disease where someone can be infectious with generalized respiratory symptoms for several days before they develop a rash. Because of the high likelihood of becoming ill, and the seriousness of the illness, state and local guidelines recommend an exposed, susceptible person be quarantined for the duration of a full incubation period after exposure without exception.
- Although the MMR vaccine may not be fully effective for 14 days following the vaccine, we know the vaccine does *begin* working right away and provides increasing levels of protection against measles and mumps over time.

Are exclusions discrimination against unvaccinated students?

- No, this is not discrimination. Exclusion is way to protect our community from preventable disease transmission. Look at other similar situations where we regulate behavior for the public good. As a society we do not have a problem with cell phone texting. It is legal in most venues but not all. It is illegal to text while driving because it puts the driver at risk of an accident and those drivers are on the road with

everyone else. Laws against texting while driving are not discrimination; rather, they focus on the specific times when texting is dangerous. Exclusion is the same. It is used only in times when there is an outbreak of disease that represents a threat to the unvaccinated person as well as the community where they live.

- Exclusion of susceptible people is a core tenant of infection prevention and outbreak control and is implemented to protect people's health. On an individual level it also serves to help protect the unvaccinated person, including individuals who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons.
- Parents who have chosen not to vaccinate their children have signed a Certificate of Exemption for their child which, since 2011, details the responsibilities that go with their choices. *"My child may not be allowed to attend school or child care during an outbreak of the disease that my child has not been fully vaccinated against."* The Certificate of Exemption also states *"Exempting my child from any or all required vaccines may result in serious illness, disability, or death to my child or others. I understand the risks and possible outcomes of my decision to exempt my child."*

Why can't my child come back to school if I am willing to hold the school harmless if my child becomes ill?

- Parents have the right to make personal choices for their children. However, choices made on an individual basis regarding children who attend school have an impact on other families and children. Allowing unvaccinated children to re-enter school while a school is experiencing an outbreak puts more people at risk than the unvaccinated child. If the unvaccinated child becomes sick, he or she can transmit the disease to others in the school before being diagnosed or even before symptoms are recognized (measles is contagious for 4 days prior to onset of the rash).

What should I know about vaccine shedding?

- There is no evidence that someone who has been recently vaccinated with MMR vaccine could give measles to another person by shedding. A tool in measles outbreak investigation is genotyping of the virus, which is a genetic fingerprint of the virus. This allows for confirming transmission and for identifying country of origin of the virus. The recent outbreaks in the U.S., including the Washington outbreak, have a different genetic fingerprint than that used in the MMR vaccine. The MMR vaccine protects against this circulating virus and does not cause illness.