

March 2014

Measles and transplant patients FAQ

You likely have heard or read about recent outbreaks of measles in several communities. This letter is intended to provide general information on measles for transplant patients who are on anti-rejection drugs.

1. What is measles?

Measles is an infectious disease caused by the measles virus. This virus is very contagious and is usually transmitted through the air (ie. coughing). Direct person-to-person contact (ie touching) is not necessarily needed for virus transmission. It is important to remember that spreading of the virus from the infected person starts about 5 days before a rash even appears, to about 4 days after the rash.

2. Who is at risk of measles?

Patients who have not had measles or the MMR vaccine may be at risk of catching measles. Most people born before 1970 are likely to have had measles, but this is **not** 100%. Transplant patients are at risk if they *never* received 2 shots of vaccine or only one shot of vaccine prior to their transplant. A few patients may not have had a good response to the vaccine and would need to be tested for immunity to be really sure.

3. What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles usually starts with fever, 'flu-like' symptoms, sore throat, and lack of appetite. Some patients also develop red eyes, sneezing, coughing and then a typical rash. Red rashes usually start on the face and then spreads to form red patches on the body. Patients start to improve even 1-2 days after the rash starts, but they may still have a cough for many days. Although there is little data, it is possible that transplant patients may be at higher risk of measles complications of the lungs, ears, or brain.

4. What should I do to protect myself?

Generally transplant patients need to stay away from people that are ill and use common sense. *Washing your hands after touching surfaces, avoiding people with fever, cough or rashes are reasonable precautions for measles, even if you have had vaccinations.*

5. What should I do if I develop symptoms?

If you develop rash or fever, please call your doctor, the transplant team or the transplant infectious diseases team (Dr. Hosseini at 519 663 3840). Please **do not go** to the doctor's office without calling first as you may transmit measles to other patients. You can take Tylenol® if you develop rash or fever. Rest and drinking fluid are always helpful. Please do not take aspirin if you are younger than 18. This medication may cause a severe side effect called Reye syndrome.

6. Is a test available for the diagnosis of measles?

Yes. Your doctor may arrange for some laboratory tests and blood works. For some patients it may not be needed to do the test.

7. Can I receive the measles vaccine?

There is a vaccine called MMR which provides protection against measles, mumps, and rubella. **Since it is a live virus vaccine, MMR vaccine must be avoided by all transplant patients on anti rejection drugs. It is important for all family members and close contacts to have been immunized so that they do not get measles.**

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