

Bringing Vaccines, Information to the Fight Against Measles

Though requests for vaccinations are increasing, pharmacists might be limited by state laws.

By **Fred Gebhart**, contributing writer

Pharmacists nationwide are adding medically sound information and vaccinations to the fight against measles.

Outbreaks were reported this year in New York, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, and Texas. Nearly all the infected individuals had not received the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

“We are seeing increased demand for vaccination and pushback on anti-vaccine groups,” said Mitchel C. Rothholz, RPh, MBA, chief strategy officer for APhA. “At a minimum, pharmacies are serving as additional outlets for information to the public about the importance of MMR vaccine. They are a conduit to address some of the misinformation that is circulating.”

The CDC notes that among unvaccinated individuals, nine of every 10 who are exposed to measles will develop it. The virus can survive up to two hours in the air and on surfaces where an infected person has coughed or sneezed. A person is infectious up to four days before the rash appears.

About 10% of children with measles develop ear infections, and 5% develop pneumonia. Up to 2 in 1,000 die from measles complications, and 2 in 10,000 develop subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, usually years later, and die or suffer permanent impairment.

Interest in Measles Vaccine Spiking
Just what pharmacists can do is based on

what individual states allow. In Oregon, for example, pharmacists are providing plenty of information, but relatively few MMR vaccinations. The state practice act limits pharmacists to prescribing and administering vaccines without a prescription issued by another provider to individuals seven years or older, noted Amy Valdez, RPh, immediate past president of the Oregon State Pharmacy Association. In neighboring Washington, another state with an outbreak, pharmacists have no age limit on vaccination.

“We usually administer about 50 MMR doses a year,” said Beverly Schaefer, RPh, co-owner of Ketterman’s Sand Point Pharmacy in Seattle. “We have done more than 50 doses in the first six weeks of this year alone.” The Washington Department of Health reported a 500% increase in MMR vaccinations for Clark County, the area most affected, between Jan. 1 and Feb. 16, compared to the 2014-2018 average.

Interest in receiving MMR vaccination runs from parents on behalf of newborns to senior citizens, Schaefer says. Older adults generally don’t need MMR vaccination because most who were born before the late 1950s had measles, and the infection confers lifetime immunity.

Measles Vaccine and Kids

The usual immunization schedule calls for a first dose of MMR at one year and a second dose between age 4 and 6, Schaefer noted. However, the second



Beverly Schaefer, RPh, and Steve Cone, RPh, co-owners of Ketterman’s Sand Point Pharmacy in Seattle.

dose can be given as soon as four weeks after the first dose.

Many parents want the second dose ahead of schedule, she said. “And we are seeing uptake for people who are traveling with their kids and for previously unvaccinated children who need vaccination for school trips.”

Even parents who had refused vaccination are changing their minds as their children move into upper grades, Schaefer says. Many school travel abroad programs require MMR vaccination as a condition to participate.

“When they bring their kids in, I don’t have anything negative to say about the delay,” Schaefer says. “I emphasize what a good thing they are doing to protect the healthy status of their child.” ■