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To: Higher education administrators and health directors

From: Kirsten Johnson, MPH, Secretary-designee

Stephanie Schauer, Ph.D, Wisconsin Immunization Program Manager

Ryan Westergaard, MD, Ph.D. Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist for
Communicable Diseases

Measles Preparedness for Wisconsin Colleges and Universities

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Summary

As Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) prepare to welcome students and staff for the 2026–2027 school year, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) is sharing resources related to measles to support preparedness and operational planning.

High-density academic and residential campus environments present unique vulnerabilities for the rapid airborne transmission of measles. Considering the ongoing 2026 measles outbreak in Southwestern Wisconsin and national measles case totals reaching levels not seen since the pre-elimination era, DHS recommends enhancing outbreak preparedness by **actively verifying students' immunization status** and **proactively recommending measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccination** for all students who do not have documentation of receiving two doses of MMR.

Background

Measles is a highly contagious infectious disease that can be transmitted by direct contact with infectious droplets or by airborne spread when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. College campuses create ideal conditions for this type of airborne virus to spread because students live, eat, learn, and socialize in high-density spaces like residence halls, dining facilities, and crowded lecture halls. A single infected person can easily expose hundreds of people in a very short period, often before they even realize they are sick.

Students' return to campus this fall will occur while public health agencies across the United States are reporting national measles case totals reaching levels not seen in decades. In Wisconsin, state and local health officials are actively responding to a multi-county outbreak in the southwestern part of the state. These current outbreaks are happening against a backdrop of declining childhood vaccination rates over recent years. As a result, a growing number of young adults entering college today may be unprotected or missing their second dose of the MMR vaccine.

Recommendations and Resources

Vaccination with the MMR vaccine is the single most effective strategy for preventing measles outbreaks and protecting the campus community. To strengthen institutional readiness before classes begin, DHS encourages university leaders to prioritize vaccination through:

- **Verifying Student Immunization Status:** Establish an active mechanism to verify that incoming students have documented proof of measles immunity prior to campus arrival or course registration. Knowing which students have been fully vaccinated and which remain susceptible to measles is essential for rapid contact tracing and outbreak containment.
- **Encouraging Catch-Up Vaccination:** Proactively reach out to students who lack documentation of receiving two valid doses of the MMR vaccine, encouraging them to complete their series through their primary care provider, local public health agencies, or campus health services.

Additionally, DHS has numerous resources for health care and public health partners around measles, including a [measles readiness toolkit](#). This is geared toward local health departments and health clinics, but university health clinics may find benefit from it as well. Both the toolkit and our most recent [Wisconsin Health Alert Network message](#) about measles include numerous links to informational resources to help with clinical preparedness and public outreach.

The CDC has developed a Checklist for Institutions of Higher Education containing links to useful resources and listing [Best practices for Preparing and Responding to Measles](#). These practices include:

- Knowing how to contact your local health department(s) when measles is suspected.
- Reviewing the Wisconsin DHS [measles readiness toolkit](#).
- Communicating institution policies to staff, students, and faculty.
- Identifying temporary isolation space.
- Making sure your institution has a supply of masks to give to a person with measles symptoms.
- Developing a plan for isolating people with measles until recovery.
- Developing a plan if students cannot return home for isolation.
- Making a plan for how to continue education.
- Maintaining and ensuring timely access to documentation of measles immunity status for all students.

- Preparing student health services staff as appropriate.

We encourage all university health directors and their teams to join our **Wisconsin Health Alert Network** email list. We issue health alerts to give health care providers and public health partners information and resources, including clinical guidance, on issues that pose a risk to health statewide.

Sign up on the [DHS Health Alert Network web page](#).