DCHHS Officials Issue Measles Advisory for Travelers to Mexico

Travelers to Mexico, especially young children, need to be vaccinated against measles

May 18, 2004 – At a press conference held this afternoon, officials with Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) issued a Measles Advisory, alerting those who are planning to travel to Mexico that Mexico has seen a marked increase in reported measles cases this year.

“Adults and children who are planning to travel to Mexico and are not already immune to measles need to be vaccinated,” DCHHS Chief Epidemiologist Dr. Assefa Tulu said. “This is especially important for young children ages 6 months to 4-years-old.”

According the DCHHS Medical Director Dr. Karine Lancaster, vaccination is not recommended for adults who have had the measles, have received two doses of the vaccine as part of their regular immunization schedule, or were born before 1957. People born before 1957 when measles was widespread in the United States generally are considered immune.

“If your child has started elementary school and his or her immunization schedule is up-to-date, they should be fine,” Dr. Lancaster said. “Completion of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) at 12 to 15 months and 4 to 6 years of age is a requirement for school admission.”

Standard measles vaccination recommendations call for one dose of the vaccine at 12 to 15 months of age and a second dose at 4 to 6 years of age. **Due to the Measles Advisory, health officials recommend that children as young as 6 months, who will be visiting Mexico, should receive a dose of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella).** Completing the sequence at 12 to 15 months and at 4 to 6-years-old is still recommended as part of a child’s immunization schedule.

“This is a precautionary measure we are advising to prevent a measles outbreak like Dallas experienced in 1989 and 1990,” Dr. Lancaster said.

Health officials advised parents to visit their primary health care provider or visit an immunization clinic to ensure their children are protected against measles. The DCHHS Immunization Clinic will be open this Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon and will **offer free immunizations to children under age 5** to ensure they are fully protected against measles and other vaccine preventable diseases. The Garland Health Department will hold a free measles vaccination clinic on Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**According to the Texas Department of Health, Mexico has recorded 64 measles cases so far this year, including a recent case in Ciudad Acuña across the border from Del Rio. Last year, Mexico recorded a total of 44 cases.**

DCHHS has distributed the Measles Advisory to area doctors and hospitals, school nurses and community organizations to alert the community about the issue.
Dallas County and Texas experienced a measles epidemic from 1989 to 1991, peaking in 1990 when there were 4,409 reported cases in Texas (1,896 in Dallas County), with 12 deaths (9 of the 12 deaths were in Dallas County.) Dallas County last had a reported measles case in 1997, and Texas reported its last measles case in 2002.

Measles is a highly contagious viral illness that usually begins with a fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher followed by a cough, runny nose and sometimes watery eyes. A flat red rash usually begins two to four days after the onset of the fever. The rash usually first appears on the face and upper neck before spreading to the back, trunk, arms, legs, hands and feet. **Anyone with these symptoms should receive medical attention immediately. Physicians are required to immediately report suspected cases of measles to public health authorities.**

Measles is an airborne illness usually spread in nose and throat droplets expelled when an infected person sneezes or coughs. Complications from measles can include diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, seizures, infections of the brain and nervous system and, on rare occasions, death.

The measles vaccine is usually given in a form that also includes protection against mumps and rubella. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to become effective.

Measles vaccination and all other childhood immunizations will be available from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday, May 22nd. **Parents need to bring children’s shot records or school notifications. Due to the Measles Advisory, immunizations for children under age 5 will be free. For all others, the cost is $10 for first time visitors to the clinic, $5 for all other children.** (Please note that the cost is per child, not per shot.) Medicaid is also accepted.

The Garland Health Department will hold a free measles vaccination clinic at Good Shepherd Church, 214 South Garland Avenue on Sunday, May 23rd from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the gymnasium for families traveling to Mexico this summer who meet the recommended guidelines.

Dallas County Health and Human Services offers low-cost immunizations daily (Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., with extended hours until 6 p.m. on Wednesdays) at the DCHHS building located at 2377 N. Stemmons Freeway. Low cost immunizations are also available at other county clinic locations with varying hours. **Parents need to bring children’s shot records or school notifications and the cost is $10 for first time visitors to the clinic, $5 for all other children.** (Please note that the cost is per child, not per shot.) Medicaid is also accepted.

The public can call 214-819-2004 for more information about the Measles Advisory.

(Media please call Amanda McKeen Simpson at 214-819-6329)

###