As international travel increases for the summer, DPH officials encourage travelers to protect themselves against measles

HARTFORD, Conn.— As the summer travel season begins, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is reminding travelers to make sure they are up to date with measles vaccination. Measles is rare in the United States and cases are often connected to international travel. Declines in measles vaccination rates globally during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the risk of larger measles outbreaks worldwide, including in the United States.

DPH recommends all international travelers consult their healthcare provider several weeks prior to departure to make sure they are up to date on all recommended vaccines, including the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine (MMR). The MMR vaccine is a two-dose series with at least 28 days between the first and second dose. Individuals are considered fully protected 14 days after their second dose, so plan to be fully vaccinated two weeks before leaving. Not all adults may have received two doses, as the recommendation for a second dose was implemented in the 1990s. There may be additional vaccine recommendations depending on the destination and planned activities. Please check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Global Measles Travel Health Notice for additional travel health advice, including where measles outbreaks have been reported.

“Measles is a highly contagious viral illness. It can take up to 21 days for symptoms to begin after exposure,” said DPH Commissioner Manisha Juthani, MD. "Symptoms typically begin with a fever, cough, runny nose, and redness or swelling of the eyes that can last for two to four days prior to rash onset. Measles can cause severe health complications, but two doses of the MMR vaccine are very effective at preventing infection.”

As of June 8, 2023, the CDC has been notified of 16 confirmed U.S. cases of measles across 11 jurisdictions, with 14 (88%) linked to international travel. Based on current estimates, twice as many Americans are planning to travel internationally in 2023 compared with 2022. Many countries and popular travel destinations, such as London, England, have experienced measles outbreaks in recent years. The United States has seen an increase in measles cases during the first five months of 2023, with 16 reported cases compared with three in 2022 during the same period. Most of these cases were among children who had not received MMR vaccine.

Adults who need MMR vaccine should contact their primary care provider, a pharmacy, or a travel clinic to determine availability of vaccine. All children aged 18 and younger are eligible to receive MMR vaccine at no cost through the Connecticut Vaccine program. Anyone with questions regarding the Connecticut Vaccine Program can call 860-509-7929 or email dph.immunizations@ct.gov. For more information about vaccine preventable diseases, please visit Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (ct.gov)