



Bulletin No. 21  
October 13, 1998  
Measles Outbreak Update

Between September 16 and October 9, 1998, 23 cases of measles have been confirmed in Alaska (Figure 1). As part of the outbreak investigation, measles was retrospectively confirmed for patients having rash onsets on September 5 and 14. An additional 14 persons with a febrile rash illness consistent with measles have been identified – it is expected that a portion of them will be confirmed as having measles. The outbreak began in Anchorage and all the confirmed cases have been in Anchorage. Measles is also suspected in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and Kenai Peninsula. Confirmed cases range from 10 to 32 years of age, with a median age of 15 years.

**Measles diagnosis and laboratory testing:** Experience has shown that the clinical diagnosis of measles is often not reliable. In order to accurately track the size and spread of the outbreak and decide on control measures (such as temporarily lowering routine measles vaccination recommendations to include 6-12 month olds), it is critical to continue to collect appropriate clinical specimens. **The most important specimen is a serum sample obtained on or after the 4<sup>th</sup> day of rash.** Since virus has now been successfully isolated from several of the early cases, collection of throat swabs and urine specimens is less important. However, if measles is suspected in a patient who was recently given MMR, a throat swab and urine specimen should be collected for viral culture.

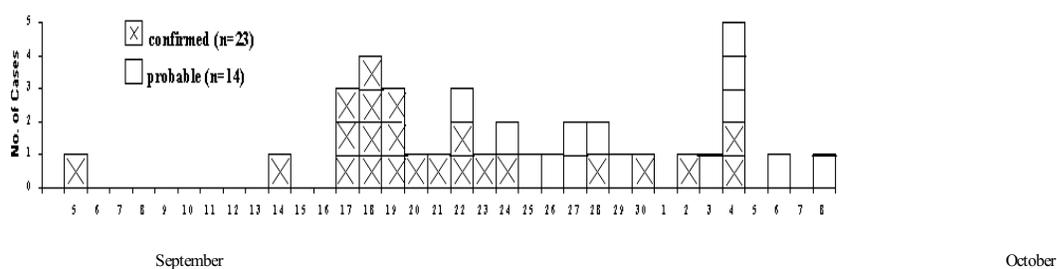
**Vaccination requirements for schoolchildren:** On September 24, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services ordered that all children enrolled in Anchorage schools have two doses of measles vaccine. **Students in Anchorage schools who do not have documentation of two doses by November 16, 1998 will be excluded from school unless they have a valid medical or religious exemption or serologic proof of immunity to measles. On October 2, the two-dose vaccination requirement was expanded to include all schools in the state – the deadline for students in schools outside Anchorage is January 4, 1999, though districts may choose to set an earlier date.**

The above requirements cover students enrolled in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade at any public or private school in Alaska. If there is evidence of measles transmission in pre-schools, the requirement may be broadened to include licensed pre-schools and child-care facilities.

**Tuberculin skin-testing of schoolchildren:** State regulations require annual tuberculin skin-testing of children enrolled in pre-elementary school, grade K, 1, 3, 7, or 11, or in a district or school for the first time. Testing is required within 90 days of enrollment. However, if a tuberculin skin-test is applied earlier than 4 weeks after a person has had an MMR, the skin-test may give a false negative result.

Because control of the measles outbreak is a very high public health priority, and because large numbers of children will need to be vaccinated before the school exclusion deadlines, enforcement of state regulations requiring tuberculin skin testing of schoolchildren has been **temporarily** suspended. The Section of Epidemiology will resume enforcing the tuberculin skin-testing regulations when the measles outbreak is over. School districts will be notified on a case-by-case basis when tuberculin skin-testing requirements are reinstated.

Figure 1. Confirmed and probable\* measles, by date of rash onset, September-October, 1998; Alaska



\*Probable measles is defined as a person with a generalized rash lasting at least 3 days with a fever of at least 101°F accompanied by cough, coryza, or conjunctivitis.