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Measles - Imported Again

Two outbreaks of measles have occurred since February, 1980, involving a total number of 5 confirmed cases.

The first outbreak, involving 4 cases, occurred in active duty soldiers at Ft. Richardson in Anchorage. The first case, a 19-year-old soldier, was reported on March 3 by Elmendorf Hospital. Ft. Richardson medical personnel responded quickly and an epidemiologic investigation revealed that the index case first became ill on February 11, shortly after arriving in Alaska on temporary duty from Ft. Belvoir, Virginia. He had been stationed at Ft. Greely for 2 days and then sent on to Ft. Richardson where his illness resulted in hospitalization. Contact with the Virginia State Epidemiologist confirmed the existence of large measles outbreaks among soldiers at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, and at two other Virginia military bases. Intensive surveillance and review of emergency room records identified 3 other probable cases in active duty soldiers at Ft. Richardson. No secondary cases were identified at Ft. Greely or Ft. Wainwright.

Review of immunization records and absentee records at the 3 Anchorage schools and at the day care center located on the military base failed to uncover any illness compatible with measles, and all children had a record of current measles vaccination.

The discovery of 4 probable measles cases resulted in the prompt institution of control measures by the military. All active duty personnel in Alaska who did not have documented history of measles vaccination were immediately vaccinated. Within 10 days, more than 2,200 doses of measles vaccine were administered. No further cases are known to have occurred.

Numerous outbreaks of measles and rubella have occurred in military personnel in past years, reflecting the changing epidemiology of these diseases in the United States. The Department of Defense is now providing measles and rubella vaccinations to all sero-negative recruits during basic training. This policy will have a dramatic and beneficial effect in decreasing the number of susceptible young adults in the population and should remove a major source of imported measles and rubella outbreaks.

(Reported by Sgt. Ray Thomas, Ft. Richardson, and Airman Barnett, Elmendorf AFB)

Our second imported measles outbreak involved only 1 known case, a 20-year-old man who became ill soon after arriving in Anchorage from Minnesota. Contact with the Minnesota Health Department confirmed the presence of a large measles outbreak at the University of Minnesota where the patient had been working in a pizza parlor frequented by university students. Despite extensive case finding efforts, no secondary cases were discovered.

(Reported by Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center)

Cases of measles and rubella will continue to occur. Early reporting of suspect cases allows for institution of control measures which can be effective in halting spread of disease. Please continue to report all suspected cases immediately to the Section of Communicable Disease Control, 272-7534 or ZENITH 1700.