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Possible Measles Outbreak In Shungnak

An Eskimo family, who had been living in Oklahoma since 1971, visited Shungnak on June 6. One 8-year-old child had an illness diagnosed as measles by an Oklahoma physician two weeks before arriving in Alaska. The other child, seven years old, developed a fever and rash illness one week after arriving in Shungnak. Subsequently, three children developed fever and rash illness in the village. Two of the cases were clinically typical of measles. A preliminary survey showed that all school age children were up to date on their measles/rubella immunization. However, only 40% of the preschoolers in the surrounding area had received a measles or rubella vaccination. These people were located and immunized. Virology cultures are pending and bloods have been drawn for measles serology. We are awaiting laboratory confirmation of the diagnosis in the Shungnak outbreak before announcing our first measles cases in over three years. We have expected imported measles cases to occur for some time now.

We attribute Alaska's enviable record of being the only state in the United States without measles for the past three years to our very high levels of immunization throughout the state.

The low levels of immunized children found in the preschool age group underscores the need for constant effort to maintain our high levels of immunization. All health workers should review the immunization status of all children for whom they have responsibility. All children who are eligible to receive measles or rubella shots should be immunized immediately. Our record with measles and rubella is one that we can be proud of; let's continue the tremendous public health effort which has enabled us to be free of these two illnesses for so long.

(Reported by Kathy Luria, Physician's Assistant, Mary McMahan, PHN, Nellie Grist, Nursing Aide)

Rubella Hits Anchorage

After two and a half years without a case of rubella in the State of Alaska, an imported case has been discovered coming through the Anchorage airport. During the past six months, a massive rubella epidemic has resulted in over 360,000 cases of rubella in Japan. A 23-year-old stewardess developed a fever, headache, and generalized rash after arriving in Anchorage on a routine flight. Acute and convalescent serologies confirmed the diagnosis of rubella. In spite of extensive surveillance of airport contacts, no secondary cases occurred. Serological screening was done of 117 women working at the International Airport. Of those screened, 108 women showed evidence of protection against rubella. Of the nine women who were susceptible to rubella, four were not Alaskans. We feel that our high level of immunization against measles and rubella has been responsible for the disappearance of these two diseases from the state. The fact that no secondary cases occurred indicates how effective vaccination is in the control of this disease. We stress the need for all health workers to continually see that patients for whom they are responsible are kept up to date on their immunizations.

(Reported by Paul Steer, M.D.)

Diphtheria Strikes Again

A four-year-old boy developed a sore throat and fever in April. Throat cultures were initially positive for group A streptococcus and the patient responded to penicillin treatment. However, the sore throat recurred despite several courses of antibiotics. Throat cultures taken by an alert physician subsequently proved positive for toxigenic diphtheria organisms. The patient had three childhood DTP shots and a booster two years later. He has done well and is without apparent ill effects from his infection. All contacts have been cultured and have had their immunizations brought up to date. This included a large day care center in Anchorage. No further cases have come to light and contact cultures are pending in the state laboratory. We wish to emphasize that diphtheria can occur in people whose immunizations are up to date. Diphtheria immunization protects against the effects of the toxin elaborated by the diphtheria germ. It does not prevent an infection by the organism in the throat or skin of an individual.