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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 14, 2017

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Michigan's second measles case of 2017 confirmed in connection with first, travel-related case

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services today announced a second confirmed case of measles in Michigan. This case is an adult and the direct result of an exposure to the state's first case of the year in late March. The two individuals, who are not members of the same family or otherwise related, were both passengers on the same flight when the first individual was contagious.

“This underscores the importance of routine vaccination for both children and adults, and of making certain as many Michiganders as possible have protective immunity against measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases,” said Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive for MDHHS. “Measles is highly contagious, and though it is generally a rare disease in the United States – in fact it was eliminated from the country in 2000 – it shows up every year as a result of travel to other parts of the world where it continues to be a common illness.”

Measles is a viral infection that can result in pneumonia, brain inflammation, hospitalization, and death. The illness starts with a high fever, runny nose, cough, reddened light-sensitive eyes, and is followed by a red, raised body rash starting on the head and face which progresses to the rest of the body. A person with measles may be contagious for a few days before they start having tell-tale symptoms, increasing the possibility of exposing others to the infection; they remain contagious until several days after the rash appears. Measles virus spreads through the air through coughing and sneezing.

Because measles is highly communicable, vaccination is the best line of defense. Successfully controlling it and preventing outbreaks requires high levels of immunity in all communities.

The United States has made tremendous progress against measles. Before 1963, when the measles vaccine became available, each year there were four million cases, about 48,000 hospitalizations, and 450-500 deaths related to measles.

Last year, Michigan had one case of measles. From 2001 – 2012, the average number of measles cases in the United States per year was about 60. But in recent years there have been more, which is of great concern to public health authorities. In 2014, there were 667 cases in the U.S. including five cases in Michigan. The vast majority of people who get measles have not been vaccinated against it.

The measles vaccine is highly effective and very safe. Adults who do not have evidence of immunity against measles should get at least one dose of the vaccine. The first of two routine childhood measles vaccine doses is given at 12 months of age. For international travel, infants as young as 6 months should be vaccinated against measles. The vaccination, or documentation of immunity to measles, is recommended for all persons travelling internationally.

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