

Measles outbreak presents threat to University

University's Health Center advises preventative vaccinations

By Dan Eisler
Emerald Reporter

The University is at high risk for a measles outbreak, and the Student Health Center is trying to avoid it with a second measles vaccination.

Currently enrolled students born after 1957 are advised by the Oregon Health Department to obtain a second dose of measles vaccine. Starting in Fall, 1990 students applying to the University will be required to show proof of receiving two vaccinations as a condition for

admission.

The measles requirement can be filled either through one of three vaccines: A measles vaccine, a combination measles-rubella vaccine, or a combination of measles-rubella-mumps vaccine.

While the second vaccine is recommended for current students, it will be required of future applicants to the University.

Newly admitted students without proof of a second dose could have their subsequent winter term registration held

up, after a one-term grace period, said Dr. James Jackson, health center director.

A notice of the new requirement is included in the admission packets going out to newly admitted students.

"Over the past five years it's become apparent college students are at a historical risk for measles," said Dr. David Flemming, assistant state epidemiologist for the Oregon Health Department.

Nationally, outbreaks occur in two populations: young, non-immunized pre-school aged children and older, immunized high school and college-aged populations, said Jim Becraft, field services public health educator with the Oregon Health Department.

"(College populations) live in a high contact area. The measles vaccine given in the early '70s is not as effective as the current vaccine, so that makes them a prime target," Flemming said.

The vaccine administered up

to 1979 lost potency through improper refrigeration. That year a more heat-stable vaccine was developed, Becraft said.

Furthermore, the vaccine was administered at 12 months instead of 15, as recommended nationally until 1976, and school immunization laws did not go into effect in many states until after students had entered school, without optimal vaccine coverage, Becraft said.

"Measles is probably the most contagious disease known," affecting people up to age 32 or 33, Jackson said.

"If someone's within shouting distance of someone else with measles, he's probably going to get them," Jackson said.

Although no cases have been reported at the University, it's just a matter of time, Jackson said, particularly after an outbreak at Southern Oregon State College last April and May.

The outbreak occurred toward the end of school, when five student teachers contracted measles, said Dr. Glen Shipley, director of the student health center at SOSOC.

The teachers, their students and entire residence floors had to be immunized, swamping the health center in the process, Shipley said.

"If there is a case, all hell breaks loose. We would be obligated to vaccinate," Jackson said.

"Measles is not a benign disease," Jackson said, adding that of about 12,000 reported cases in the United States last year, 40 people died from measles, the highest toll in 18 years.

About 10 percent of the people with measles may develop complications, Jackson said, adding that adults develop

more complications.

One complication is inflammation of the lining of the brain, which may potentially cause brain damage, Jackson said.

An immunization waiver will be available for the measles if there is a medical exemption based on medical contraindication in accordance with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the U.S. Public Health Service, according to a student health center press release.

A waiver will also be available for a religious exemption based on a person's adherence to a religion, the teaching of which are opposed to immunization, according to the release.

In addition, no requirement for measles vaccine will be enforced for summer-term only students.

The new requirement is based on the following recommendation by health agencies including The Oregon Public Health Department, The American Academy of Pediatrics, The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, and The American College Health Association.

The Oregon Public Health Department is now requiring a second dose of measles vaccine to be given to Oregon children by the age of 12 years. However, the University will not have a reduced risk to a measles outbreak for another seven years unless a second vaccine is required, according to the release.

Measles vaccine is available, without appointment, at the University health center for about \$22, Jackson said. "We're trying to take a pro-active stand," he added.

For further information, students can call the health center at 686-4441.

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