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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CDC Reports An Increase in Measles Cases in the U.S.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported in a web cast yesterday that the U.S. has had more cases of measles this year than anytime since 2001. Between January 1 and April 25, 2008, there have been 64 cases of measles including 4 cases in downstate Michigan. Carol Rombach, Upper Peninsula Regional Immunization Representative, reports that the CDC investigation showed that two-thirds of the children, who were old enough to be immunized, had not been immunized because of personal belief or religious exemption.

Measles is a respiratory illness that spreads through direct contact with the mucus or saliva of an infected person, or by airborne droplets. Dr. Randall Johnson, Medical Director of the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department states that the initial symptoms include a fever, cough, red eyes, and runny nose. After three to seven days, a characteristic rash develops that starts on the face and then moves down the body to the arms and legs, including the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. One in three people with measles develops complications such as diarrhea or pneumonia, which can lead to hospitalization, and even death. The disease can be more severe for infants, pregnant women and people who have weakened immune systems.

Rombach states that it's important that parents who are making decisions about immunizing their children are aware of the measles risk that's ongoing around the country and make sure that they have a chance to talk with their provider about opportunities for protection. Rombach states that we have seen resurgences of measles in the past. Between 1989 and 1991, the United States suffered 55,000 cases of measles and 123 deaths. Prior to the vaccine it was common to have an annual death rate of 500 children or more. Even today, nearly 22% of these 64 cases were hospitalized.

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Romback states that the good news is that the measles vaccine is very safe, 99 percent effective, and we strongly recommend un-immunized persons to be immunized. “It is outbreaks such as these that remind us that until measles is eliminated worldwide like smallpox, we have to keep our immunization rates high,” concludes Romback.

For additional information and the recommended vaccine schedule, visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines>.

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