MEASLES OUTBREAK

A recent outbreak of measles linked to exposure at Disneyland in California has been much in the news recently. Measles is a viral illness that is very easily spread through the air through coughing and sneezing and breathing. It is characterized by symptoms of fever, cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis followed by a rash. Symptoms begin 7-21 days after exposure, with most getting ill 7-14 days after exposure. Fever is often the first symptom, then cough, runny nose and conjunctivitis. A characteristic rash that typically begins on the head and then spreads to the trunk and then extremities follows the other symptoms. Someone with measles is contagious from 4 days before the rash begins to 4 days after the rash begins.

Infection with measles can have significant complications, ranging from ear infections, pneumonia and diarrhea to infection of the brain, leading to permanent brain damage or death. According to the CDC website, one or two of every 1000 measles patients will die from respiratory or neurologic complications of measles. Persons most at risk of complications from measles are the very young, the very old, pregnant women, and individuals with a weakened immune system.

Measles is preventable by use of the measles vaccine. The vaccine has been so effective that in the year 2000 measles was declared eradicated from the United States. Most recent cases of measles in the United States have occurred in unvaccinated persons who have travelled internationally or who come from countries other than the US. Georgia Perimeter College requires students to have had the measles vaccine (the MMR vaccine, which stands for measles, mumps, and rubella). However, there are a small number of students who have not had the complete series, due to medical issues that prevent vaccination, religious or moral objections, or failure to complete the vaccination series.

Every student that does not have a medical reason precluding vaccination is encouraged to get the measles vaccine. The vaccine is available at GPC Student Health Services. Any student who has had a known exposure to someone with measles should let Student Health Services know by calling 678-891-4105.