

Infectious diseases A-Z: Children aren't getting vaccinated before international travel

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U.S. children who travel abroad are not getting the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine before they travel to protect them from ongoing measles outbreaks, says a recent study.

This leaves the [children](#) vulnerable to the highly infectious disease,

which has made a resurgence in the U.S. after being eliminated in 2000. Most of the [measles](#) cases in the U.S. result from international travel.

"The current recommendation is any U.S. child who's traveling internationally should be immune to measles because there is a risk of exposure, either when you arrive in your destination country or in the process of getting there," says Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, a pediatric [infectious diseases](#) specialist at Mayo Clinic. "This includes children between 6 and 11 months of age who have not yet received the standard first dose of measles [vaccine](#) in the U.S., which usually occurs between 12 to 15 months."

"If children between 6 and 11 months are traveling, they may be eligible to get an earlier dose of the measles vaccine before they travel, which can provide them with some protection," says Dr. Rajapakse. "It's really important to talk to your primary care physician or pediatrician if you're planning to travel, especially with young children." It is best to get the vaccine at least two weeks before you depart on your trip.

The measles vaccine is given as part of the MMR vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that the MMR be given to children at 12-15 months of age. A second dose is recommended before a child starts school, around 4-6. If children receive an early dose of MMR vaccine between 6-11 months because of international travel or a local outbreak, they still will require both routine doses after 1 year of age for full protection.

Measles is a highly contagious viral infection that spreads through coughing or sneezing. Complications may include ear infection, pneumonia and encephalitis, which can result in permanent brain damage. Measles can be prevented through vaccination.

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