



# Epidemiological Alert:

## International travelers— Risk of measles or rubella infection

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The Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO / WHO) urges all Member States to strengthen their international travel advisories so that they are protected against measles and rubella prior to departure. This recommendation applies to both incoming travelers and for those traveling outbound of this Region.

Due to upcoming cultural and sporting events that will be hosted by countries in the Americas, PAHO/WHO encourages Member States in the Region to recommend vaccination against measles and rubella for all travelers to and from the countries of the Americas, in order to reduce the risk of reintroducing these diseases that have already been eliminated in the Americas.

Travelers who are not vaccinated against measles and rubella are at risk of getting these diseases when visiting countries where these viruses are circulating. Member States should seek to ensure vaccination, with particular attention to women of childbearing age to prevent any infection caused by the rubella virus during pregnancy.

### **Evidence of immunity to measles and rubella for travelers includes:**

- Written documentation of having received the measles and rubella vaccines;
- Laboratory confirmation of rubella and measles immunity (a positive serologic test for the measles and rubella-specific IgG antibodies).

Travelers over 6 months old who are unable to present the documents indicated should be advised by Member States to obtain vaccination for measles and rubella or preferably the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine. Ideally, the vaccine should be administered at least two weeks **before** departure.

Travelers with medical contraindications against undergoing vaccination for measles and rubella are the exception to the above instructions. In addition, infants under 6 months old should not be vaccinated. Infants that receive the MMR vaccine before their first birthday must be revaccinated according to the vaccination schedule in their country.

### **PAHO / WHO recommends that Member States strengthen the following recommendations for travelers (at Points of entry, places of tourism, medical centers):**

For the duration of the trip and upon returning to their point of origin, travelers should take notice of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Rash
- Cough, coryza (runny nose), or conjunctivitis (red eyes)

If the traveler believes that they have measles or rubella, they should:

- Remain in the place where they are lodging (hotel or home, etc.) except to go to a doctor. They should not travel nor go to any public places;
- Avoid close contact with other people for seven days following onset of rash.

PAHO/WHO advises personnel in the tourism and transportation sectors (e.g. hospitality, taxi, airport staff) to also be immunized against measles and rubella. Member States should coordinate with the appropriate institutions to strengthen vaccination of these populations.

In addition it is necessary to continue working towards the inclusion of the private healthcare sector and private healthcare facilities that provide medical attention to tourists in surveillance systems, as it is more likely that international travelers seek medical attention in private healthcare facilities.

In this regard, PAHO recommends reminding healthcare workers in both the private and public sectors to the possible presence of both diseases, and reminding them of the importance in immediately notifying such findings, in accordance with national surveillance guidelines, in order to ensure a rapid response.

It is also important to carry out educational campaigns, directed to those involved in the tourism industry (e.g. hospitality staff, taxi drivers, airport staff), of the disease symptoms in order to facilitate providing persons with symptoms with guidance to go to the nearest health facility.

PAHO / WHO also promotes the practice of requesting immunity tests for measles and rubella as a requirement for employment in the health care sector (medical, administrative and security).

In addition to the measures already mentioned, PAHO encourages the practice of requiring proof of immunity for measles and rubella as a pre-requisite to employment in the healthcare sector (medical, administrative and security personnel).

## **Information for the public**

- Work with the private sector (travel agencies, hotels) to guide travelers about the importance to be immunized before travel.
- Inform travelers returning to their country of origin of the symptoms of measles and rubella and the need to go to seek professional health care in such a case.
- Use the points of entry and exit of countries to disseminate information on the importance to prevent both diseases through immunization.