
Amy Parker Fiebelkorn,1 Susan B. Redd,1 and David T. Kuhar2
1Division of Viral Diseases, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, and 2Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia

Between 2001 and 2014, 78 reported measles cases resulted from transmission in US healthcare facilities, and 29 healthcare personnel were infected from occupational exposure, 1 of whom transmitted measles to a patient. The economic impact of preventing and controlling measles transmission in healthcare facilities was $19 000–$114 286 per case.

Keywords. measles transmission; vaccine failure; economic; healthcare personnel; healthcare facilities.

Measles is an acute febrile rash illness that is transmitted by direct contact with infectious droplets or by airborne spread. Approximately 8% of measles case-patients experience diarrhea as a complication, 7%–9% develop otitis media, 1%–6% acquire pneumonia, and 1–2 per 1000 case-patients develop encephalitis [1]. Death occurs in 1–3 per 1000 cases.

Measles was declared eliminated (defined as the interruption of continuous transmission lasting ≥12 months) from the United States in 2000 due to high 2-dose measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccination coverage, improved measles control in the World Health Organization Region of the Americas, and intensive and rapid public health responses to imported measles cases [2]. However, even in an elimination era, imported cases and limited spread still occur. Due to the severity of measles, it is not uncommon for infected individuals to seek medical care at primary care centers, pediatric offices, emergency departments, or hospitals [3]. Our objectives were to assess during the postelimination era the frequency of measles transmission in healthcare facilities in the United States, determine the number of healthcare personnel (HCP) infected with measles while at work, evaluate 2-dose MMR vaccine failure in healthcare facilities and subsequent spread, and describe the estimated economic burden of measles outbreak responses in US healthcare facilities.

METHODS

We assessed measles surveillance data reported to the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from 1 January 2001 through 31 December 2014, to determine the number of measles cases transmitted in US healthcare facilities or among HCP. We also searched the PubMed database from January 2001 through December 2014 using the search terms measles, transmission, and vaccine failure to identify documented instances of individuals with 2 prior doses of MMR vaccine who became infected with measles and transmitted the virus. We did an additional PubMed search using the search terms measles, economic, and health care to determine the estimated range spent by US healthcare facilities in response to measles case-patients or outbreaks in their facilities. We cross-referenced articles referenced in the above searches that were not captured in the database search.

RESULTS

Between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2014 (2014 data are through 31 December 2014 and are provisional), 1822 measles cases were reported in the United States (annual median, 64.5 [range, 37–668]), of which 504 were imported cases, 1191 were secondary and tertiary cases, and 127 had an unknown source. Of the 1318 non-imported (ie, secondary, tertiary, and unknown source) cases, 78 (5.9%) were transmitted in US healthcare facilities or among HCP. We also searched the PubMed database from January 2001 through December 2014 using the search terms measles, transmission, and vaccine failure to identify documented instances of individuals with 2 prior doses of MMR vaccine who became infected with measles and transmitted the virus. We did an additional PubMed search using the search terms measles, economic, and health care to determine the estimated range spent by US healthcare facilities in response to measles case-patients or outbreaks in their facilities. We cross-referenced articles referenced in the above searches that were not captured in the database search.

between 2001 and 2014, 78 reported measles cases resulted from transmission in US healthcare facilities, and 29 healthcare personnel were infected from occupational exposure, 1 of whom transmitted measles to a patient. The economic impact of preventing and controlling measles transmission in healthcare facilities was $19,000–$114,286 per case.

Keywords. measles transmission; vaccine failure; economic; healthcare personnel; healthcare facilities.

Measles is an acute febrile rash illness that is transmitted by direct contact with infectious droplets or by airborne spread. Approximately 8% of measles case-patients experience diarrhea as a complication, 7%–9% develop otitis media, 1%–6% acquire pneumonia, and 1–2 per 1000 case-patients develop encephalitis [1]. Death occurs in 1–3 per 1000 cases.

Measles was declared eliminated (defined as the interruption of continuous transmission lasting ≥12 months) from the United States in 2000 due to high 2-dose measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccination coverage, improved measles control in the World Health Organization Region of the Americas, and intensive and rapid public health responses to imported measles cases [2]. However, even in an elimination era, imported cases and limited spread still occur. Due to the severity of measles, it is not uncommon for infected individuals to seek medical care at primary care centers, pediatric offices, emergency departments, or hospitals [3]. Our objectives were to assess during the postelimination era the frequency of measles transmission in healthcare facilities in the United States, determine the number of healthcare personnel (HCP) infected with measles while at work, evaluate 2-dose MMR vaccine failure in healthcare facilities and subsequent spread, and describe the estimated economic burden of measles outbreak responses in US healthcare facilities.

METHODS

We assessed measles surveillance data reported to the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from 1 January 2001 through 31 December 2014, to determine the number of measles cases transmitted in US healthcare facilities or among HCP. We also searched the PubMed database from January 2001 through December 2014 using the search terms measles, transmission, and vaccine failure to identify documented instances of individuals with 2 prior doses of MMR vaccine who became infected with measles and transmitted the virus. We did an additional PubMed search using the search terms measles, economic, and health care to determine the estimated range spent by US healthcare facilities in response to measles case-patients or outbreaks in their facilities. We cross-referenced articles referenced in the above searches that were not captured in the database search.

RESULTS

Between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2014 (2014 data are through 31 December 2014 and are provisional), 1822 measles cases were reported in the United States (annual median, 64.5 [range, 37–668]), of which 504 were imported cases, 1191 were secondary and tertiary cases, and 127 had an unknown source. Of the 1318 non-imported (ie, secondary, tertiary, and unknown source) cases, 78 (5.9%) were transmitted in US healthcare facilities or among HCP. We also searched the PubMed database from January 2001 through December 2014 using the search terms measles, transmission, and vaccine failure to identify documented instances of individuals with 2 prior doses of MMR vaccine who became infected with measles and transmitted the virus. We did an additional PubMed search using the search terms measles, economic, and health care to determine the estimated range spent by US healthcare facilities in response to measles case-patients or outbreaks in their facilities. We cross-referenced articles referenced in the above searches that were not captured in the database search.
confirmation of disease, or birth before 1957 [5]. For unvaccinated personnel born before 1957 who lack laboratory evidence of measles immunity or laboratory confirmation of disease, healthcare facilities should consider vaccinating personnel with 2 doses of MMR vaccine at the appropriate intervals. In outbreaks, 2 doses are recommended for all HCP who do not have other evidence of immunity, including those born before 1957 [5].

In addition to the 29 HCP, there were 5 measles cases among HCP who were either infected outside of work or had an unknown transmission setting. Although we did not include these 5 HCP, they had the potential to pass on measles to their patients or other healthcare providers.

Transmission setting data were available for 1452 of 1822 (79.7%) measles case-patients. Among the 29 HCP who had occupational exposure, data on transmission setting were 100% complete, whereas among the 5 HCP not included in the analysis, 1 was infected outside of work and 4 had an unknown transmission setting.

Of the 1822 case-patients, at least 914 (50.2%) sought medical evaluation including clinical diagnosis, supportive care, laboratory testing, or hospitalization, placing HCP and patients at risk for measles exposures. Although some of the case-patients had laboratory specimens collected during home health visits rather than visiting healthcare facilities, these interactions still placed HCP at risk for measles.

Secondary measles transmission from patients to HCP with 2-dose MMR vaccine failure has been reported, but has always been a rare event. Often, transmission to a person with 2-dose MMR vaccine failure results in modified or inapparent measles. This was described in 2 case studies of modified measles in physicians vaccinated with at least 2 doses of MMR vaccine who were exposed to primary measles cases in 2009 [6]. Neither of these physicians had tertiary transmission of measles to their patients. We also did not find any literature describing tertiary measles transmission in healthcare facilities among HCP with 2-dose MMR vaccine failure who presented with classic measles symptoms.

The economic impact was described in 5 US healthcare facilities that implemented a public health response to prevent or control the spread of measles after 1 or more measles patients sought medical treatment in their facilities. Costs assessed included the number of HCP furloughed, time spent reviewing employee records for evidence of measles immunity, and time spent conducting serologic tests and administering vaccine doses. A healthcare facility in Illinois spent an estimated $19,000

---

**Table 1. Measles Cases Transmitted in Healthcare Facilities—United States, 1 January 2001–31 December 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Measles Cases Transmitted in US Healthcare Facilities</th>
<th>No. of HCP Infected at Work</th>
<th>Did HCP Transmit Measles to Patients or Other HCP?</th>
<th>Evidence of Immunity Status of Infected HCP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6 had ≥2 MMR doses, 2 had positive titers, 1 had 1 MMR dose, 1 born before 1957, 1 unknown vaccination status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 had positive titers (1 of whom also had 1 MMR dose), 1 unknown vaccination status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 had 2 MMR doses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 had positive titers, 2 were unvaccinated, 1 unknown vaccination status, 1 had 2 MMR doses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 had 2 MMR doses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 had ≥2 MMR doses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes (infected 1 patient)</td>
<td>1 unknown vaccination status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 unvaccinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 unvaccinated, 1 born before 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1-dose vaccinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Yes (once in 2008)</td>
<td>19 (65.5%) had adequate evidence of measles immunity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: HCP, healthcare personnel; MMR, measles, mumps, and rubella; NA, not applicable.

a The 2014 data are through 31 December 2014 and are provisional.

b Presumptive evidence of immunity to measles for persons who work in healthcare facilities includes any of the following: written documentation of vaccination with 2 doses of live measles or MMR vaccine administered at least 28 days apart, laboratory evidence of immunity, laboratory confirmation of disease, or birth before 1957. However, for unvaccinated personnel born before 1957 who lack laboratory evidence of measles immunity or laboratory confirmation of disease, healthcare facilities should consider vaccinating personnel with 2 doses of MMR vaccine at the appropriate interval. For unvaccinated personnel born before 1957 who lack laboratory evidence of measles immunity or laboratory confirmation of disease, healthcare facilities should recommend 2 doses of MMR vaccine during an outbreak of measles.
responding to 1 measles case-patient who presented to its emergency department in 2008 [7], a medical center in New York spent $63,000 responding to 2 measles case-patients in 2011 ($31,500/case) [8], an Indiana healthcare facility spent $113,000 responding to 3 case-patients in 2005 ($37,667/case) [9], and 2 Arizona hospitals spent $800,000 responding to 7 measles case-patients in their facilities in 2008 ($114,286/case) [4].

DISCUSSION

Despite being an eliminated disease in the United States, 1,822 measles cases were reported in the United States from 2001 through 2014, among which at least 50.2% of case-patients sought medical evaluation. These cases placed HCP and other patients at risk for measles exposures and the healthcare facilities at risk for being sites of potential transmission. In recent measles outbreaks, measles was not considered in the differentials at risk for being sites of potential transmission. In New York City in 2011, a 2-dose vaccinated theater employee transmitted measles to 4 individuals with presumptive evidence of immunity against measles [13]. In Pennsylvania in 2003, a 2-dose vaccinated individual transmitted measles to 2 unvaccinated persons [14]. In Finland in 1989, 2-dose vaccinated and unvaccinated primary patients were found to be equally contagious within families [15]. In Wisconsin in 1986, a 2-dose vaccinated index patient with classic symptoms transmitted measles to 13 previously vaccinated (likely 1-dose vaccinated) classmates [16]. These situations are uncommon and do not suggest a need for change in current measles vaccine policy, but they highlight that transmission can occur from 2-dose vaccinated individuals.

The United States has high population immunity against measles due to the Vaccines for Children Program (a national initiative that entitles uninsured or underinsured children to free vaccine), the 2-dose measles-vaccination schedule, and school-entry vaccination requirements [17]. However, as long as measles remains endemic in many parts of the world, the measles virus will continue to be imported into the United States. These imports and subsequent exposures have the potential for serious or fatal outcomes in susceptible high-risk individuals. There is also the potential to cause significant disruption in healthcare facilities, resulting in substantial response costs. As many individuals infected with measles seek medical treatment, HCP remain at risk for measles exposures. HCP should be familiar with the signs and symptoms of measles and should obtain a travel history in patients presenting with a rash and fever. Rapid case identification with implementation of airborne precautions, including the use of respiratory protection at least as protective as a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health–certified N-95 respirator for patient care [5], is critical.

Notes

Disclaimer. The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Financial support. No external funding sources were used to gather the data, analyze the data, or write up the findings.

Potential conflicts of interest. All authors: No potential conflicts of interest.

All authors have submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest. Conflicts that the editors consider relevant to the content of the manuscript have been disclosed.

References