



South Central Public Health District
1020 Washington Street North
Twin Falls, ID 83301
866-710-9775
www.phd5.idaho.gov



February 21, 2019

PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

Contact: Brianna Bodily, Public Information Officer, 208-737-5985

**Public Health Nurse Is Back Home after Helping to
Fight Measles Outbreak in Washington**

SOUTH CENTRAL IDAHO- Two nurses left Idaho this month to help fight the spread of measles in our neighboring states, one from the South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) and one from the Panhandle Health District. Tanis Maxwell, SCPHD lead epidemiologist, worked in Vancouver, Washington, right in the center of the outbreak. For 12 straight days, Maxwell worked long hours with a team to help control the measles outbreak.

“There were tense moments, especially when we got a call about a suspected case of measles. That amped up the mood because you have to catch those quickly and respond fast before it spreads or seriously harms the patient,” Maxwell said. “Some people think about measles and say, ‘no big deal,’ but they forget about the possible long term complications: ear infections that cause hearing loss, pneumonia, or even swelling in the brain, which is really dangerous.”

Much of Maxwell’s work focused on households with measles. If one member of a family tests positive for the disease the whole household has to stay indoors for about 21 days, or until the disease has run its course. If another member of the household gets measles in that time, the 21 day incubation period starts over again.

“That’s just another reason it is so important to get vaccinated,” Maxwell said. “Vaccinated people were still allowed to go out and about and continue life but unvaccinated people, who were exposed, had to stay indoors until they could prove they were immune, with a blood draw, or until the incubation period was over. I talked to people who were stuck inside at home for weeks at a time.”

The 12 days were exhausting, but educational for Maxwell. She said her experience working in the center of the outbreak gave her valuable insight for the future.

“Public health officials from Clark County have already spent months fighting this virus. I was able to spend nearly two weeks working alongside them, learning their processes and what needs to happen in what order,” Maxwell said. “We’ll have a head start on the disease if it ever comes here.”

In the meantime, she urges the community to make sure they are shielded from measles with two doses of the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine. Vaccinations are a crucial step in protecting yourself and the community from preventable diseases like the measles. SCPHD has offices in Twin Falls, Heyburn, Gooding, Jerome and Bellevue that offer vaccine clinical hours. If you are not sure about your vaccine history call your doctor or local public health district office to request a copy of your records.

In addition to assisting the efforts in Washington, South Central Public Health District has provided local hospitals, doctor offices and other health care providers with information about measles including: what to look for in a suspected case and how to prevent infecting other patients.